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TORONTO

Nor Death Dismay

*A RECORD OF MERCHANT SHIPS AND
MERCHANT MARINERS IN TIME OF WAR*

By SAMUEL DUFF McCOY

*"Of sea-captains young and old,
and the mates, and of all intrepid sailors,
Of the few, very choice, taciturn,
whom fate can never surprise nor death dismay."*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY • NEW YORK

1944

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To
Quincy Adams Damon
Marine Engineer

FOREWORD:
VOYAGE-LETTER

FROM THE firing of the first American gun at Pearl Harbor, directed against the enemy planes overhead, the people of America gave their full measure of gratitude and admiration to the men who wore the uniforms of the armed forces of the United States. A few months later, the nation began to sense that the heroism of men in uniform was being matched by a body of Americans who wore no uniform—a body of civilian seamen, who, in the first months of the war, had been sent out, without weapons in their hands, to face an enemy armed with the most frightful of weapons; unarmed men, who had gone out without hesitation to face death.

These were the men of America's merchant ships.

But secrecy enveloped the comings and goings of these men, secrecy was enforced upon all the movements of ships at sea. All that the people of America could be told was little indeed. With mounting sorrow, week after week, they read the terse statement that "an American cargo vessel" (unnamed) had been damaged or sunk; but they could only guess at what the men upon such a ship had endured. Seldom did any detailed account find its way into print, and even then neither ship nor men were named. The people of America *sensed* that the men of the American merchant marine were men to be proud of—but only the men themselves *knew* what the sea masked.

Of the unending carrying of military equipment, troops, and food for our Allies, from American ports to ports overseas, this was said: "We simply do not know and cannot yet be told

the cost of these operations. Ships go down, and men with them, and their battles are seldom recorded. The merchant seaman voyages from mystery to mystery. Never since men explored unknown waters in rude sailing ships has the sea witnessed so much risk, so much loss, such splendor of the human spirit, nor so vast a crisis in mankind's fate."

When that was said, one American steamship company—the American Export Lines—had already begun to gather from its own ships' officers their personal narratives of war-time voyages. The voyages here described form but a small fraction of the thousands of war-time voyages successfully completed by the vast fleet of cargo-vessels directed by the War Shipping Administration. Every steamship company in the United States had joined in that titanic enterprise. The present narrative does not even include the hundredth part of what the officers and men of this *one* company accomplished. What is set down here can serve only in faint measure to indicate the courage, the loyalty, the cheerful acceptance and performance of tasks beyond man's strength to perform—but which the men of the merchant marine did perform—that was typical of all.

* * *

The long voyage ending, the tired ship—having delivered her precious cargo, taken through countless dangers—moves slowly up the harbor and comes at last to the pier which is her home. Shore workmen swarm around and over her littered decks. The men of her crew, joyfully or gloomily, prepare to go ashore. But the work of her deck officers is not yet finished, although the mate, bending over the broad-paged log book in the chartroom, has written—with the stub of a pencil, upon its final page—that entry that compresses into its few short words all the immense relief of men who for weary months have been bearing the unbearable burden of responsibility, secrecy, and unceasing danger of sudden or dreadfully lingering death:

"Arrived, 9:21 A.M. Secure at pier. F W E."

"F W E"—"Finished With Engines." A sigh of ineffable relief!

The rough-log has been finished; but the ship's Master has still many duties to be done before he may rest. Last of all these, there is the Voyage-Letter to be prepared—that brief summary of all the significant events of the voyage, from its beginning to its present end, which will preserve forever the record of an American vessel and the American seamen who served upon her.

S. D. McC.

The quotation on the title page is from “Song for All Seas, All Ships” in *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman.

C O N T E N T S

	FOREWORD: VOYAGE-LETTER	vii
I	THE PIER-SHED	I
II	"START BOTH ENGINES!"	26
III	THE NUISANCE	48
IV	THE DROTTNINGHOLM JOB	73
V	THE EXPRESS	81
VI	A SHORE JOB TO DO	97
VII	THE UNDEFEATED	111
VIII	THE EXAMELIA'S MEN	127
IX	A PAIR OF ACES	153
X	YOU MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK	163
XI	HOME FOR CHRISTMAS	186
XII	SHUTTLE TO NORTH AFRICA	212
XIII	"COURAGE, EFFICIENCY AND RESOLUTION"	223
XIV	"THE FEW, VERY CHOICE, TACITURN—"	231

NOR DEATH DISMAY

I

THE PIER-SHED

THE PIER is naturally the place at which this story begins.

Specifically, this pier is known as Pier F, Jersey City. On the west bank of the Hudson River, it juts out into the river directly opposite the lower tip of Manhattan where the skyscrapers of the financial district are clustered. This pier is the terminus for the ships of the American Export Lines, an American shipping company, whose particular field of service was to the ports of the Mediterranean, of the Black Sea, and of India. From the pier, looking across the broad river, one can see the towers of downtown Manhattan, and, among them, the building at the foot of Broadway in which are the Company's head offices. Beyond those buildings is the bay, and beyond the bay are the Narrows, beyond the Narrows is Ambrose Channel, and beyond that is the open Atlantic.

Some men assemble at this pier. They are the men of the deck crew, the engine-room crew, the steward's department. The officers may be in uniform, the men are not. They pass through the long pier-shed quickly and go on board their ship, hardly glancing at the hurrying stevedores as they pass by. The stevedores are moving mountains of cargo, bags, boxes, bales, crates, from the floor of the pier-shed to the ship's holds. This is the movement of America, movement eastward across the sea, America going to distant lands, where these goods are needed. It is not the business of the ship's crew to put this cargo on board. But it is their

business to get the ship and its cargo to its ports of call, on an exact schedule. These men have been doing just that, keeping the ships to schedule, for twenty years. It's routine. To them, a voyage is a job to be done. None of them ever thinks of himself as a hero, or dreams that by any possible chance he might ever become a hero. Why should he? In a world at peace ships leave their harbors with nothing more difficult to face than wind and sea. These are good ships, and the officers know their business. What is there to fear?

The crew walks through the pier-shed cheerfully. The voyage will not be long. Soon they will be back again, going ashore again, paid off, hurrying through that same pier-shed to go home.

High overhead, the sudden deep bellowing of the ship's steam siren signals that the hour of departure has arrived.

Thus the ships went out, until war suddenly brought new problems and new dangers of man's own making.

This is the story of how an American ocean-steamship company met those problems, of how its ships and the men who sail them met those dangers. But the United States had not yet gone to war when this company's war story began.

* * *

In the autumn of 1939, American ships were no longer permitted to put in at the port of Marseilles. France was at war. But the American Export ships continued to visit the ports of the countries bordering the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, which had not yet entered the war. The Company was little more than twenty years old. It had been founded just after the close of the first World War. It was neither as old nor as large as some of the famous steamship lines, and yet in twenty years it had made rapid strides. Its field of business was originally the Mediterranean but it had extended its service into the Black Sea. Beginning by carrying only freight, it soon equipped its ships to carry passengers as well. Thousands of Americans came to

know the historic and fascinating lands bordering the Mediterranean—Spain, France, Italy, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, Turkey and Greece—by reaching their seaports on this American company's vessels. To the lines it operated to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the Company eventually added a third line—a service to India. The first of its vessels placed in this service reached India in January, 1940, arriving there by way of the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea. During the next six months all the ships went to and returned from India by this route. To and from the ports of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and of India the American Export Lines were carrying cargoes valued at hundreds of millions of dollars.

These were the Company's ships, going steadily back and forth:

Exochorda, Excalibur, Exeter, Excambion;

Exporter, Explorer, Express, Exchange, Exemplar, Exhibitor, Executor, Examiner;

Examelia, Extavia, Exmouth, Executive, Expositor, Exiria, Exilona, Exmoor, Exminster, Exarch, Exford, Exchester;

Excelsior, Excellency, Exton, Exbrook. They came and went in peace.

* * *

On the tenth of June, 1940, clerks in the company's offices at the pier were thinking enviously of men who can go to sea, instead of remaining cooped up in a stuffy office on shore. It was a hot day. The bit of breeze from the bay that wandered in through the open window wasn't enough. Out there on the wide river, tugs and ferryboats, oil tankers and cargo ships were bellying fretfully at each other. Bent over their desks, the clerks could hear the rumble of the machinery lowering cargo into the holds of the two ships at the pier. One is the Executive. She was scheduled to sail on June twelfth, for Genoa. The other was the Exilona. She was to sail the day after the Executive, bound for

Tangier. The Exeter, one of the finest of the Company's twenty-eight ships, was already far out at sea. She had sailed on the eighth of June, beginning her sixtieth voyage to the Mediterranean, commanded by Captain S. F.—"Ruby"—Ransone; Quincy Damon was her chief engineer. She was bound for Genoa, carrying forty passengers and nearly six thousand tons of cargo.

A clerk looked up from his work. "Don't you wish you were on the Exeter, right now?" he asked, mopping his forehead. "Can you imagine? Plenty cool, out there!"

"You can have it," answered another. "Just give me Jones' Beach, that'll be plenty."

There was a moment's silence, while the pens moved on. Another voice broke it.

"Speaking of beaches," it said, "how would you like to have been on the beaches at Dunkirk?"

"I wouldn't have wanted any part of 'em," declared another, with emphasis. "God, it must have been awful! But you've got to hand it to those birds—I heard on the radio they got the whole three hundred and thirty thousand off safe, back to England."

"Sure, it's in the papers this morning. You gotta hand it to 'em. But so what? The Germans have nothing to stop 'em now. They'll be in Paris by tomorrow."

"Think they'll invade England?"

"Why not?" retorted the other. "What's to stop 'em?"

"Well, thank God *we* aren't in it."

"Don't kid yourself. Maybe they won't make a stab at *this* country, but did you ever stop to think what might happen to this Company? Figure it out. When the Germans finish spreading all over France, they'll have Marseilles. Think they'll let us get in there any more? Not on your life! And they'll shut us out of every French port in North Africa, as soon as they can. Do you think they'll let us keep on going into Oran and Algiers or any of those places? Nix! They'll grab Suez. And a fat chance this

Company will have, for any business with Egypt, after that! Where do *we* get off?"

"Well, we'll still have all the Italian ports to go into," said the other, hopefully. "You remember when Cap' Ransone was in here last week? You heard what he said, didn't you? He said Italy won't *ever* get into it. We can still go to Italy."

"Yeah? Well, he ought to know. He's been over there plenty."

The telephone rang. Someone picked up the receiver.

"Yes, this is the pier. Hello, Miss Mac. What's on *your* mind?"

He listened, startled, incredulous; then replaced the receiver and swung around to face the others.

"Well, here it is," he said grimly. "Italy has declared war on France. You know what *that* means, don't you? The Mediterranean will be roped off, in the next ten minutes. You guys had better start lookin' for another job, right here and now. Goodbye American Export Lines!"

* * *

Men do not surrender so easily. It is not an American habit to surrender. The men who had built up that business through the years went into action. Between pier and office, office and pier, flashed the calls:

"The Executive and the Exilona are finishing loading. They are scheduled to sail for the Mediterranean within the next three days."

"Cancel those sailings. Hold them here."

"The Exeter, the Extavia, and the Excello are half way across the Atlantic, bound for the Mediterranean."

"Wireless them. Order them back."

"The Exmouth, the Exchange, the Exmoor and the Excalibur are already in the Mediterranean."

"Nobody will stop them from coming back. Go on!"

"The Excellency left here for India, by way of Gibraltar, of course, five days ago. She won't be allowed to get past Gibraltar."

"Cable her at Gibraltar. Tell her to proceed by way of the Cape of Good Hope. All our India ships will have to go that way from now on."

(That decision added ten thousand miles at sea, and six weeks of time, to the Excellency's voyage. But her cargo was delivered . . .)

"Okay, boys, let's go! We've got eight brand-new ships, just launched last year, that we've been using in the Mediterranean run. Let's put them into our India service. They're twice as fast as the older ships. We'll build our India service up into a world-beater!"

"What do we do with our Four Aces? They carry more than a hundred passengers each now."

"We'll run a shuttle to Portugal with 'em. There isn't a port left in all Europe except Lisbon. You can't get into Europe, or out of Europe, except through Lisbon."

"Let's go!"

They were quick, these Americans. They had to be. Before that first week was over they had worked out the plans that would keep twelve of those twenty-eight ships as busy as they ever had been. The other sixteen? The Company's executives had no worries about *them*. Their telephones were already ringing. Other shipping companies were calling. England's war had taken England's merchant ships out of the trade lanes; they were carrying only war cargoes now; and the German submarine that sighted an English ship had no mercy. American shipping companies couldn't wait for new ships to be launched. Cargoes were piling up on docks all over the world. "American Export? Got any ship you can let us have?"

They chartered out those sixteen ships almost as fast as the ships got back from the Mediterranean. The first one, the *Exilona*, which was already in port, was chartered within two weeks after Italy's declaration of war on France, and the closing of the Mediterranean. One company chartered two ships; an-

other took three; another four; another five; and then they chartered them all over again. There was not one of the twenty-eight Export ships which wasn't as busy as it ever had been.

What if the Mediterranean *was* closed to them? Surrender? Why, no! The Americans had just *begun* to fight . . .

And there was Lisbon.

* * *

Until then, Lisbon hadn't meant much to the Company. Seldom, if ever, had one of the Company's ships gone direct to Lisbon from New York, in twenty years. And it had been only rarely that one of its ships, homeward bound after circling the Mediterranean, had turned northward after emerging into the Atlantic and had put in at Lisbon. The business hadn't justified more frequent calls.

But it was different now. War suddenly turned a floodlight upon Lisbon.

Genoa, greatest of Italy's seaports, had been chosen by the Company as its headquarters in Europe, from the first. The Company's offices had been in the Via Garibaldi, in the center of town, for years. Its staff wasn't large. It numbered only Charley Kalloch, director for Europe; John MacGowan, his assistant; Fred Citriolo and Lewis Hart; Lundstad and Vecchy, the auditors and accountants. Ed Davidson, marine engineering superintendent, who hopped from one Mediterranean port to another whenever and wherever a ship's engines needed him, was usually in Genoa, too. He was there on that tenth day of June. A score of Italian clerks, and a middle-aged Englishwoman who never quite learned the American language, but was tops in all else, completed the office force. The Americans all spoke Italian, when they had to, and often they made themselves understood.

These Americans in Genoa already knew what war brings with it. The whole continent of Europe to the north of them had

been ablaze for the past twenty-one months. Terror-stricken refugees from Hitler's fury had been pouring into every Mediterranean port from the north, desperately seeking any ship which would carry them to safety. Even before September, 1939, when that war broke out, hundreds of them had crowded into Italy. On the first of September the great Italian liner, the Conte di Savoia, was about to sail for New York. Twelve hundred passengers had booked upon her. On the third of September, on the instant England declared war, the sailing of the Conte di Savoia was canceled. The twelve hundred, in a panic, besieged the American company's offices. They were too late. The Company's ships were already booked to capacity.

Day after day, through nine months, the telephones in the office in the Via Garibaldi had never ceased ringing, from morning to night. Lew Hart had held the receiver clamped to his ear until his arm ached. Alexandria, Athens, Beirut, a dozen other seaports, wrestled for the wires.

"Genoa? Paris calling. Have you space?"

"Genoa? Marseilles calling. Have you space?"

"Genoa? Budapesth calling. Have you space?"

"Genoa? Vienna calling. Have you space?"

From end to end of war-torn Europe came the anxious calls. The piles of telegrams, the stacks of letters, heaped higher and higher on the desks. "No space." "Sold out." "No space left, sorry." Over and over the tired voices chanted the monotonous refrain . . . And in those nine months the Company's ships took thousands of people away from the outstretched claws of Hunger, Torture, Fear, and Death, and brought them to sanctuary across the sea.

* * *

The narrow, four-story building which housed the Company's Genoa offices on the Via Garibaldi was four hundred years old—a sixteenth century ducal palace. It was no palace now. The

local branch of a New York bank occupied the street floor, the steamship offices were at the head of the first flight of stairs, the floor above was shared by a clutter of brokers, and the top-most floor—there wasn't any elevator, of course—had been converted by Charley Kalloch into his living apartment. In the offices there was a radio. It hadn't been put there for amusement. Italy wasn't at war, but one had to listen to the gloomy news from the north.

The tenth day of June saw the Company's office as crowded and as busy as it had been for months past. And there was an added tension in the air. The morning brought an announcement that Mussolini was to make "a speech of supreme importance" at six o'clock that afternoon. Every Italian who came into the office was ill at ease. But the Americans scoffed at their fears. "Announce war?" they laughed. "Aw, forget it! He won't put out anything except the usual line of hot air." No one in Italy wanted war.

In Rome, three hundred miles down the coast, the black-shirted police were herding the people into the space in front of the Palazzo Venezia. Fifty thousand faces looked upward to its grand balcony, at the little figure strutting there, with its thick lips and outthrust chin. The battery of loudspeakers blared his words over the crowd.

"Oh, shut off that radio!" muttered someone impatiently. "We've got work to do." He reached for the dial. But before his fingers could touch it the sickening words had blared out into the room. "Italy declares war upon France!"

The cable from the New York offices came in the next day. "Close Genoa office immediately," it said. "Lundstad and Vecchy return to New York. Kalloch, MacGowan, Davidson, Citriolo and Hart transfer to Lisbon office." Kalloch was to take a plane for Lisbon, if possible; the rest were to follow by ship.

All through that day the frightened flood of Americans caught in Italy swirled into the Via Garibaldi and up the steps. There

wasn't room for them. The Exochorda had just docked at Genoa. She had on board a hundred passengers who had already boarded her at Alexandria and at Piraeus, and she would normally have had room for only thirty more. All that day long the Genoa office struggled with the heart-rending appeals of those for whom it was impossible to find room.

At the end of the day no one went home. They stayed on, to go over the heaped-up papers and to prepare the documents for the vessel's departure on the next day. Nine o'clock came, ten o'clock passed. They worked on. Hart glanced up at the clock. It was five minutes to eleven. "Bring me the passenger lists," he said. "Got to get going on the final checking."

As he spoke, the air raid sirens screeched. And the next instant all the lights in the room went out, and the night was shattered with the noise of the city's anti-aircraft guns. The French planes were overhead. The city's power-plant had been shut off.

They lit candles, and at once came yells from the Italian militia patrol in the courtyard outside. "*Chiudere le griglie! Chiudere le griglie!*" "Close those shutters!"

They blacked out their windows, and worked on. Over in a corner of the long room, by the light of a candle placed on the floor, a half dozen Italian freight clerks, no longer able to see to work, started up a game of dice. They drank from bottles of red wine they had brought with them. In the shadows behind them three or four of their companions hummed softly a Genoese love-song. The noise of the guns died away.

Hart rang up the little hotel at the beach, the Lido, three miles from town, where he and his wife had taken rooms for the summer. The hall porter answered. "Tell my wife that I will come home as soon as the all-clear sounds," Hart said, and went back to work. The telephone rang. MacGowan, who lived in another quarter of the city, was on the wire.

"How're you coming, Lew?" he asked. "Say, listen, I've been out on the terrace of this apartment, watching the shellfire. There

was so much noise you couldn't hear a thing. A piece of shell came down through the roof, right behind me, and I never heard it. It went right on down through my bathroom. I never heard it."

"A good thing you weren't in it," said Hart.

MacGowan hung up.

At two o'clock in the morning, Hart gave up waiting for the all-clear signal, and started for home. It was raining. There wasn't a taxi on the streets. He walked to the street-car station. The power-plant was running only at intervals. At four in the morning he got home. Anybody who wanted that war was welcome to it.

When he got back to the office the next morning he found that the war had come even closer to Captain Habel, on the Exochorda. A shell fired from a shore battery at a French plane passing over the harbor had exploded high above the Exochorda. A heavy fragment of it, narrowly missing passenger quarters, had pierced the afterdeck and had gone on down into the engine-room. Captain Habel had at once sternly reported the matter to the Italian harbormaster. On the fragment of steel were Italian markings. The Italians wasted no time in repairing the damage.

The Exochorda sailed that night, for home. Her cabins had been designed to accommodate 132 persons. She sailed from Genoa with nearly two hundred . . .

The office force stayed on for eight days more. There were raids by French planes nightly. Each evening, shopkeepers began putting up their shutters before daylight faded, and long lines of people trudged toward the car-line tunnels through the hills, carrying rolls of bedding, mattresses, and boards to place upon the ground. Promptly at dusk the first French planes would appear. It was said that they were based on Corsica, less than a hundred miles away. They roared overhead two or three times each night, but they were always few in number and they did

little damage. Many of the bombs which they dropped did not explode. One of the Company's clerks, on his way to the office, gingerly walked past a bomb embedded in the earth, its fin-tails sticking up. A munitions factory was circled with a string of similar "duds." The rumor that fifth columnists working in French bomb factories before the war had filled bombs with sand, in place of explosives, gained rapid credence. The Americans went on packing up their office records and personal belongings. Davidson had been in Italy for five years, Hart had been there for nine, Kalloch even longer.

The Excalibur, commanded by Captain Sam Groves, had sailed eastward from Italy two weeks before and was expected to be back by the eighteenth, to dock at Naples. The nightly air-raids were continuing over the harbor at Genoa—the French bombs had succeeded in starting a fire on the docks one night—and the men of the Genoa office, thinking that it would be too dangerous to the ship to come to Genoa, decided to board her at Naples. But how were they to get their personal baggage and the office records to Naples?

How would they ever get it past Mussolini's watchdogs?

Their eyes lighted upon one of their clerks, an Italian. He had been bragging for years that he was a Fascist militiaman, a member of the auxiliary secret service, the *publica sicurezza*. He had once lived in New York. He adored uniforms.

"Hey you!" they shouted joyfully. "At last you can do something useful! You hop right into that nice pretty uniform of yours, and make it snappy! You're booked for a five-hundred mile drive, without a thing in the world to do but sit in the car and look handsome!"

By the time he got back, they had loaded all the boxes into a truck and a trailer. They put him on the front seat, with the driver. They waved him goodbye. They boarded the train for Naples, encumbered with nothing but hand baggage. "You

reckon that stuff will ever get there?" they asked each other anxiously.

He rolled into Naples, complete with driver, truck and trailer, only one day after their own arrival there. One glance at that uniform, and every sentry along the road had waved him on.

They sent him back to Genoa with his pockets stuffed with the atrocious cigars of Italy.

* * *

They checked their bags at the swankiest hotel in Naples, a hotel fronting on the Santa Lucia, the seawall that circles that most beautiful of bays. They sat in the hotel lounge, empty of tourists now, and stared at the bay, praying that the Excalibur would steam into sight that very day. But the Excalibur did not come that day, nor the next, nor the next. At Alexandria, she had been delayed while the British were laying new mine fields around the harbor. At Beirut, she was delayed again. They kept on staring at the azure bay, where the Italian battleships were preening themselves. She didn't come.

Twice during the seven days the air raid sirens screamed, French or British planes came over, and the clatter of the anti-aircraft guns burst out on every side. But both the raids lasted for only a few minutes. One day at noon they saw a plane come circling over the harbor and with what seemed incredible recklessness begin to drop lower and lower. Every anti-aircraft gun on shore turned loose at it, together with those of three or four Italian warships which lay at anchor in the harbor. They didn't know it, but it was an Italian plane, a passenger plane belonging to the Ala Littoria commercial line, which the pilot was bringing in to be stripped and converted to war use. By some miracle he dived under the umbrella of shell puffs which were bursting all around him and came to a safe landing in the harbor. That night he came into the lounge of their hotel. It had been hours

since his landing but he was still spluttering with rage at his compatriots' attempt to blow him out of the sky.

On the twenty-eighth of June the Excalibur at last came in. A flag, broad striped, bright starred, fluttered over her. It looked pretty good.

She brought them to Lisbon on the second of July. Kalloch greeted them. The city was crowded with refugees, mostly from Germany and France. Rooms were hard to find. Davidson managed to get one in the Hotel Borges on the hill overlooking the Company's office. Later, he and MacGowan took an apartment together. At the Borges, where several elderly English people had lived for years, the American vice-consuls, Stewart and Donaldson, resided. The American minister to Holland, George Gordon, and his staff, who had been recalled to Washington when Germany struck at Holland, were also there, waiting for passage home by ship or plane. They had been waiting for weeks, and they would wait another month before room was made for them.

Down the hill from the hotel, the Company's local agent, a Dane named Beckmann, had been striving to keep up with the new rush of business while retaining the single small room on the Rua dos Fanqueiros that had been sufficient for him for the past thirty years. The arrival of the men from the Genoa office set in motion a search for offices large enough to cope with the new situation. They succeeded in leasing new quarters on the Rua Augusta, one of the principal business streets in Lisbon. A block away, at the foot of the street, was "Black Horse Square," a plaza encircled by the government buildings. But they were not there long. The first week showed the space entirely inadequate. The sidewalk outside was jammed from morning to night with the overflow. It wasn't easy to find new quarters, but something had to be done. They finally got three floors in a building on the Rua d' Aurea, the Street of Gold. The first floor, one flight up from the street, was for the passenger and cable departments; the second was given over to freight

business, with Beckmann's office as Danish Consul; the fifth, reached by an elevator that usually broke down, housed the accounting department. This expansion, from the one room that Beckmann had had on the Rua dos Fanqueiros, to three entire floors, indicated how the business had jumped in five short months. Even this didn't give enough room for the passenger business, and it was later transferred to the second floor, where there was more room, and the freight department shifted to the first.

The Company's ships docked in the broad river, the Tagus, which flows out to the Atlantic. The docks were two miles from the new office, and taxis shuttled back and forth incessantly.

From all the Hitler-ridden countries of Europe, the streams of refugees anxious to escape to America converged upon Lisbon. No seaport north of Portugal and Spain had been open to transatlantic passenger vessels for the past ten months, since the war began. Only the very wealthy, or those traveling upon important international business, could hope to obtain passage to America by transatlantic plane. The others, a steadily growing mob, besieged the steamship office.

They sometimes booked passage on small Portuguese or Spanish steamers, which sailed at irregular intervals. Rates on these steamers skyrocketed. Their passengers, arriving in America, complained bitterly that they had been given miserable accommodations.

Within three days after Italy's declaration of war, the American Export Lines announced that thereafter the four ships which had been the pride of their Mediterranean fleet, "the Four Aces," would regularly ply between Lisbon and New York. These were the Excalibur, the Exeter, the Exochorda and the Excambion. Each one had fifty-four staterooms. Arrangements to accommodate many more passengers than the number for which these cabins had originally been designed were quickly made. Foreign steamships soon jumped their fares but the American

line held to its stabilized rates. The Company was, in very fact, "the life-line to America."

The result was that all the refugees in Lisbon, rich or poor, important or not, massed at the doors of the Company's offices. Its men who had come there from Genoa plunged into the endless demands which each new day brought with it, and never stopped to ask for orders. Davidson acted as operating manager for the loading of the ships' cargoes, but in odd moments when he wasn't dashing back and forth between office and dock, he would turn to as a typist. He wore his fingers out on the typewriter. So did Fred Citriolo. So did all of them. When new filing cards were needed, and not to be found in all Lisbon, Fred cut them out of cardboard with the office shears. Finally they managed to hire additional clerks, an English girl and some Portuguese. Until they got Canavan, Troutman and Coughlin from the New York office, and later Jack Phillipot, who was an American evacuee from Paris, they were working eighteen hours a day. Lew Hart, who had charge of the passenger bookings, now knew that all he had gone through in Genoa was merely a curtain-raiser to the deluge which now descended upon him from daylight to dark. The police had to keep order in the crowd in front of the office doors.

* * *

The Excalibur, last passenger ship to leave the Mediterranean, having delivered Hart and the others from Italy, left Lisbon for New York on the same day. Instead of the 132 passengers for which her cabins were intended, she had made room for 218. Docking at Jersey City on the eleventh of July, Captain Groves reported that in mid-Atlantic he had picked up the calls of two British freighters, torpedoed near the Irish coast. The Excalibur was back at Lisbon before the end of the month; and on the first of August she sailed again. Among her passengers this time was the Duke of Windsor, on his way to assume his post

as Governor-General of the Bahamas. He was accompanied by his Duchess, the former "Wallie" Warfield. They debarked at Bermuda. Also on board were Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, who had been American Minister to Poland; George Gordon, Minister to Holland, and William Phillips, Ambassador to Italy. The *Excalibur's* chief steward, Aurelio Gonzalez, was in a seventh heaven of excitement throughout that trip.

There was an endless procession of notables passing through the Lisbon office and sailing by this "life-line to America" during the next twelve months. Among them were Camille Chautemps, who had been Premier of France, and Lion Feuchtwanger, the famous German novelist who had been arrested by the Nazis, but had escaped from a concentration camp. Literally scores of gifted writers, artists, musicians, scientists, driven from Europe by their Nazi persecutors, reached America by this one Company's aid; America welcomed them as they stepped from the ship; of them all, Jan Ignaz Paderewski, musician, statesman, hero of Poland, received the most thunderous ovation as he landed.

Davidson, busy in the Lisbon office one day, looked up to see standing before him a tall and elderly gentleman whose ill-fitting and wrinkled clothing failed to disguise his aristocratic bearing. It was Prince Rene de Bourbon, descendant of the Bourbon kings of France.

The Prince had escaped from Paris just as the Germans entered, and, driving an old Citroen car, had crossed the Spanish border and had reached Barcelona with only a hundred francs in his pocket. A friend had staked him to enough gasoline to drive on to Lisbon. Friends in America had cabled money for his passage, and that of his wife and son, to New York.

The Princess de Bourbon, his wife, was of the royal family of Denmark. Beckmann, the Company's agent, a Dane, almost wept at being unable to provide the Prince, the Princess, and her

eighteen-year-old son, Prince Jacques, with a suitable suite on the Excambion, which was about to sail. But reservations were sacred. There was room for only two, and the Prince insisted that his wife and son should go first.

After their departure, discovering that Davidson spoke French, the Prince used to drop in for a chat, wearing an old overcoat that he had borrowed from Beckmann. He confessed to Davidson that he didn't take his royal lineage, or his chances of gaining a throne, any too seriously.

†“My family gave up the idea of the crown years ago,” he smiled. “But that cousin of mine, the Duc de Guise, still has a crazy idea he can get it!”

He grew indignant only when he spoke of the vandalism perpetrated by the Germans when they broke into his house in Paris. They had wantonly slashed the portraits of his ancestors, the Bourbon kings, upon the walls—paintings that were, of course, irreplaceable.

“That hurt,” he said grimly. “You know, Davidson, they never liked my family, anyhow.”

(When they sailed, he and his second son, and his daughter, got one room, and were delighted.)

Eve Curie, daughter of Mme. Curie, world-famous discoverer of radium, and distinguished in her own right, came in. She was amazed when Lew Hart instantly recognized her.

The procession was endless. In it, the great and the humble stood side by side. White-haired Miss Anne Morgan, who had been giving her time and money to France, just as she had in the first World War, uncomplainingly accepted a tiny cabin. Room was made for eight homeless children whom an American woman in France, Mrs. Ottilie Moore, had rescued from the Germans. She had driven them in a station-wagon out of France, across Spain, and to Lisbon. News correspondents came and went—Quentin Reynolds, Ernie Pyle, and all the rest, telling their stories of England's fortitude under the daily bombings,

and of the misery of the conquered countries. For every berth on board there were a dozen applicants in line. The Company's New York office, where George Gaede, its passenger traffic manager, and Schaefer were daily besieged by people whose friends and relatives were in Lisbon, was as much a madhouse as the office in Lisbon. One Jewish woman in New York, typical of hundreds of others, wept as she begged that her brother be brought from Lisbon. He had escaped from a Nazi concentration camp and had reached Lisbon penniless. News of his plight reached her at her little candy store in the Bronx and she hurried to the Company's offices. From her shirtwaist she pulled a huge roll of bills. But every one of them was a one-dollar bill. There weren't quite enough; but Schaefer cabled to Lew Hart, at Lisbon, to make the reservation.

The desperate people who besieged the offices in Lisbon each day gave the Company's men no rest. When the doors closed, late each night, they pursued them to their hotels. The men learned to dodge home by circuitous paths, and never dared let themselves be seen in the lobby of their hotel. Occasionally, worn out with the day's frenzied rush, they would drop in, late at night, at the hospitable apartment of the American consul-general, "Pat" Wiley, for a moment's relaxation. Often they found "Bob" Murphy there, the State Department's special representative, back from one of the flights he was continually making to North Africa—mysterious missions, whose nature he never confided to them. But it was then that Murphy was laying the foundations of American collaboration with the French in Africa. The United States had its own reservations as to the stability of the French government at Vichy. The face of Vichy was the face of Petain, but the voice was too nearly like the voice of Hitler. America, as a true friend of unconquerable France, might properly inquire into the sentiments of the French in Africa. And it was those inquiries, pursued by Murphy, which led to certain successful troop landings on the shores of North Africa, a year

later. The steamship company's men asked no questions; but life in Lisbon in those days moved on in an atmosphere of excitement which had never previously been common in the steamship business.

It was probable that you couldn't toss a pebble down the crowded length of the Rua Aurea without its making seventeen secret agents duck their heads and nine Gestapo men mutter "*Was ist los?*" The Americans didn't know, and didn't care. They were too busy to be bothered. When British secret-service men dropped in at their lodgings, of an evening—as they sometimes did—and dropped a hint that such and such an applicant for a steamship ticket wasn't just what he professed to be, they gave the Englishmen what information they had, and their thanks. And once, when a wretched fugitive from Himmler's merciless bloodhounds was conducted to them secretly, they smuggled him on board one of their ships and kept him hidden till the ship brought him to the refuge of America. They never forgot his look of terror as he waited, trembling, for the ship to move. Nor did they blame him. They remembered how the Gestapo had dragged from a Spanish train an entire company of Polish military engineer officers, just as they neared Portugal and liberty, and had sent them back to slavery and death. And this man had a price on his head . . .

So week followed week and month followed month, with the Company's four ships tirelessly crossing and recrossing the Atlantic. In twelve months they brought ten thousand people out of the terrors of Europe and into the peace and safety of America . . .

* * *

As the grip of Germany tightened upon France, month after month, the sufferings of thousands of French people deepened dreadfully. More and more deeply those sufferings touched the hearts of the people of America. Contributions to relieve this

hunger and misery began to pour into the American Red Cross from the first days of Germany's invasion of France, early in 1940; and the first shipload of supplies for the French victims of the war was despatched that June. This was sent in the McKeesport, a vessel owned by the American government. This ship had scarcely reached France when the fall of France made it necessary to begin the negotiations all over again. It was not until the beginning of 1941 that arrangements were completed with the governments concerned, and a second relief ship could be sent. This vessel, the Cold Harbor, sailed for France late in February, 1941.

The Red Cross then immediately requested the American Export Lines, through the United States Maritime Commission, to provide a third vessel, and the request was instantly granted. The Company placed the Exmouth at the service of the Red Cross, and the cargo of food and clothing and medical supplies for sick and destitute children of France began at once to be lowered into the Exmouth's holds.

The Exmouth, under command of Captain Oscar Ljungstrom, sailed at noon on March 17. A heavy snow was falling as she went out to sea, and the weather was tempestuous during most of her voyage across the Atlantic. She was a slow ship. But early in the morning of the third of April she entered the harbor of Marseilles and was moored in the *Bassin de la Joliette*.

The welcome given to the American "mercy ship" by the French sprang from their hearts. "*L' Exmouth est arrivé!*" The cry ran through the city and people wept with joy. They rushed to gaze at her. Captain Ljungstrom had begun the discharging of the cargo as soon as he had docked his ship; but the rejoicing city demanded that the work be halted for a full day to give opportunity for a suitable demonstration of France's gratitude.

They thrust roses into the hands of the American Ambassador's wife. They lined the streets along which the procession of dignitaries passed to welcome the ship. They cheered and wept

by turns—because America had sent this aid directly to their children, the little ones, “*les petits*,” dearer to them than their own lives.

Up from the Exmouth’s holds came the boxes, hundreds upon hundreds. Boxes containing twenty-five thousand layettes, for babies yet unborn. Boxes that held ten thousand little shirts, forty thousand little dresses, forty thousand pairs of little overalls—one hundred and thirty-four thousand garments for tiny boys and girls. There were boxes that held twenty-five tons of medicines, two thousand pairs of surgical gloves, fifty thousand yards of gauze. Then out of that magic hold came six hundred tons—four thousand drums—of powdered milk, and sixty-five thousand cases of evaporated milk. The French stared at those mountains of cases on the pier, overwhelmed. “*Treize millions de litres de lait pour les petits!*” they murmured. The first ship from America had brought aid such as they had not hoped to see; the second one had brought nearly as much; but this third one, the Exmouth, had brought a cargo whose value equalled that of the others, combined! And it was for their babies, their children. . . . Small wonder that tears came to their eyes. It wasn’t just that more than five thousand tons of food and clothing, with a value of a million and a half dollars, were heaped there on the wharf; no one could set a value on that gesture of friendship from one nation to another. The French themselves didn’t speak of it in terms of dollars—they called the Exmouth’s cargo “*le cargaison inestimable*.”

When the Exmouth departed, she carried with her the richest cargo she had ever carried—the love of the people of France.

* * *

On the seventeenth of April, just as the Exmouth had begun her homeward voyage, a ship flying the flag of Egypt was steaming eastward from America and nearing the coast of Africa, far to the south of the Exmouth. The ship was named the Zamzam,

and among her passengers, were one hundred and forty Americans, of whom twenty-two were young men who had volunteered to serve as ambulance drivers with the British forces in Africa. Others were missionaries, their wives and children with them.

The ship was halted in mid-ocean that day, by a German raider, and all on board were ordered into the boats. Then the raider sank the Zamzam.

The passengers, none of whom was a combatant, were treated as prisoners of war. Taken to land, they were sent to prison camps. The United States government at once protested vigorously, and, when weeks had passed, they were reluctantly released by Germany. Many of them were brought back to the United States by the Company's ships, from Lisbon. Three returned on the Excalibur, fifty-two on the Exeter.

The indignation of the American people over the treatment of Americans on the Zamzam had not cooled, when, just four weeks after the sinking of the Zamzam, Germany again wantonly offended America.

In May, the American Export Lines had sold one of their ships, the Exmoor, to another shipping company. The purchasers changed the ship's name to the Robin Moor. The ship sailed for African ports early in May. The American flag was painted on her sides, plain warning that the ship was a non-belligerent, and entitled to pass without attack by any belligerent.

On the twenty-first of May, when the Robin Moor was more than half way across the South Atlantic, a German submarine sank her without warning, by a torpedo.

Her master ordered the lifeboats lowered. The boats stayed together for three days, then drifted apart. In one, commanded by Robert E. Taylor, second officer of the ship, there were twelve men. Except for Taylor, none knew how to row. Taylor taught them quickly. They kept the boat moving. For twelve days they headed southwest, trying to reach St. Paul Rocks. On the twelfth day, a waterspout bore down on the boat, but thanks to Taylor's

training, they managed to row out of its path. The next day they were picked up by a steamer bound for Cape Town. From Cape Town, they were brought to New York on different vessels, three of them reaching Boston late in July, on board the Company's ship *Exilona*, which was returning from a voyage to the Red Sea, by way of the Cape of Good Hope. Taylor signed on, soon after, with the Company, and was made second mate of the *Exford*.

The *Robin Moor* was the first American ship sunk by Germany. All America was stirred by her loss; and the men who officered the ships of the American Export Lines felt that loss most keenly of all. Many of them had served on board her, in the twenty years during which the Company had owned her; all of them knew her.

* * *

In these early months of 1941, the underground activities of German and Italian consular agents throughout the United States grew increasingly irritating, and it was finally no longer possible to tolerate their continued presence. The Government notified Berlin and Rome that their many consulates must be closed and these individuals withdrawn. Germany and Italy, in retaliation, demanded the withdrawal of American consular representatives from those countries. Since German and Italian ports were blockaded, Lisbon was to be the port of entry and exit. The liner *America*, which had been taken over by the United States Navy and renamed the *West Point*, was assigned to carry the deportees. The task of supervising the embarkations and debarkations was naturally placed by the Government in the hands of the American Export Lines, which, with its own vessels regularly running to Lisbon, maintained in New York and at Lisbon an experienced personnel. The Company's general passenger agent, George Gaede, and his assistants in the New York office, William Schaefer and John Bailey, worked night and day over the innumerable details which arose. The *West Point* sailed on the

fifteenth of July, with the 464 German and Italian consuls and their staffs. In Lisbon, the ship took on board nearly four hundred American consular officers and their staffs who had been stationed in Germany, Italy, and the countries which had been overrun by Germany. Fred Citriolo, Lew Hart, and the others who made up the staff of the Company's offices in Lisbon, had been busied for many days with the multitudinous details preceding the Americans' embarkation. The Company's own business, that of booking passengers upon its own ships, was set aside. The nation's business came first.

The summer passed, and though the war clouds grew blacker over the seas, America still strove to keep out of Europe's war. November came, and with it the Armistice Day that commemorated the end of an older war; but it brought with it no armistice in the new war, nor any hope of one. The Americas alone remained at peace.

Mid-November marked the end of the seventeenth month since Italy had entered the war. For seventeen months the Mediterranean had been closed to the Company's ships, and for seventeen months they had been forced to ply upon other trade routes. In those seventeen months they had completed one hundred and seventeen voyages. Not one ship had encountered disaster.

But for how long could anyone hope to escape the gathering storm clouds?

The fifteen hundred men who worked the Company's ships—crews and officers, mates, engineers, and masters—wasted scant time in wondering what their luck would be if war came.

It was their business to take those ships safely across the seas and bring them safely home. That was enough.

November of 1941 ended, December began . . .

III

"START BOTH ENGINES!"

ON THE morning of the seventh of December, 1941, the freighter Examelia, which had already made sixty-five voyages during the twenty years she had served the Company, was floated out from the Baltimore dry dock in which she had been getting her tail shaft cleaned and her hull freshly painted, and, that same night, was heading out from the Delaware Capes toward New York, where she was to be loaded with cargo for another of her regular trips to India. While she was at sea, the radio brought the staggering news that the Japanese had rained ruin upon Pearl Harbor. The Examelia's skipper, Captain E. H. Nelson, a mild-mannered and cheerful little man, a veteran in the Company's service, listened to the announcement and shook his head sorrowfully.

At noon the next day, the radio brought the words of the President of the United States and the instant response of the Congress, declaring war. The Examelia was steaming northward off the New Jersey coast. Captain Nelson and his first officer, Pete Cabanillas, considered the news gravely. They, and every other man who earned his living by deep-sea voyages, knew quite well what war must bring with it.

"Here we go," observed the mate, quietly.

Captain Nelson nodded. "Looks like we've started both engines," he said.

Having said this much, they went on about their ship's business.

The Examelia anchored off Quarantine just before midnight

that night and proceeded to the Company's piers in Jersey City the next morning. Captain Nelson walked through the long pier-shed and climbed the stairs to report his arrival to old "Cap" Walters, the Company's port captain, and to "Sam" Andrews, the Operations Manager. The ship's chief engineer reported to "Robbie" Robison, the port engineer. There was a little talk of Pearl Harbor, but not much. The ship was to be loaded for Bombay, and the business of preparing for sea went on in its usual routine. There were some new regulations to be observed, the Navy had taken charge of the port; and at Trinidad and at Cape Town and in the Indian Ocean all shipmasters were to be guided by the British Naval Control, as before. The Examelia would go out unarmed. There wasn't time to arm her. The Japanese were attacking the Philippines, but there wasn't the remotest danger that they could get anywhere near the Indian Ocean. There were certainly German subs in the Atlantic, but . . .

The cargo went methodically into the Examelia's holds. All of the routine of the Company's sailings continued as before. On the ninth of December the Examelia's sister ship, the Exmoor, commanded by Captain Eklund, departed for Suez. On the sixteenth, the Exceller, with Captain Switzer as master, left for Rangoon. Two days later the Examelia went out, bound for Bombay.

That routine continued uninterrupted through January, February and March, and into April without mishap. The German U-boats began their toll of sinkings of oil tankers and cargo-ships in January, attacking the unarmed and helpless victims within very sight of the coast, and the dreadful list of disasters mounted higher and higher each month. But the Company's ships went out, as scheduled, just as before; and by some miracle escaped attack. One by one, as quickly as they were launched and commissioned, a dozen of the new Liberty ships were assigned by the War Shipping Administration to be operated by the Company, in addition to the score of vessels which the Company

owned. More than thirty captains—most of them veterans in the Company's Mediterranean and Black Sea service—took those ships to sea. The roll of masters during that first year of the war included Alepis, Anderson, Baldi, Berg, Eklund, Evans, Fayle, Groves, Habel, Hudgins, Jacobsen, W. Kalloch, Kent, Klepper, Kuhne, Lebzeltern, Ljungstrom, Carroll MacGowan, Meek, Mirkin, Mulke, Nelson, Profeta, Ransone, Ryals, Sawyer, Seybert, Snow, Stevens, Switzer, Tulenko, Walden, Wilson and Carl Wink. Five of the mates—Christiansen, Cushman, Lewerenz, Van der Linde and Villard—were promoted to the command of vessels before the year was over. Thirty-nine men. American sea-captains.

* * *

In April, those in the New York office began to hear news that they hadn't heard before. This news never went outside the office. The newspapers didn't print it. The nation had settled down to the grim business of war. The Company's ships, like those of every other shipping company, came and went in a secrecy which the public never pierced. Nor did the public try to pierce it. Every American knew that there was good reason why the movements of ships must be kept inviolably secret. The enemy lurked outside, and Death sat waiting at his elbow, his bony fingers on the lever that would set free his messengers.

Into the Atlantic, where the German U-boats lay most thickly in wait, the Company's ships had gone on their secret errands, week after week. They had come back, unharmed. Disaster came at last. But, when it first came to one of the Company's ships, it was not in the Atlantic that it struck.

The first blow fell in the Indian Ocean.

* * *

In the days of peace, when an American freight ship had reached the eastern Mediterranean it was already half way to

India. All it then had to do was to turn to the right, pass through the Suez Canal, pass down the Red Sea, and then take the first turn to the left. It had only to follow its nose to arrive at Bombay.

To link the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean in this way was as simple as adding up two and two. It was only natural, therefore, that the American Export Line, whose ships were regularly circling the Mediterranean, had for years been looking forward hopefully to an expansion eastward to the ports of India. But it was not until the end of 1939 that the opportunity came. The United States government decided to sell a fleet of four freighters which it had been sending to India. The Export Line bid for them, and, logically, got them. It added four ships of its own. In December of that year it despatched the first of this fleet of eight ships to India.

From the first, the Company resolved to provide a better service for shippers of goods to and from India than had ever been known before. It was not enough merely to provide more and better ships—the time spent by each ship while in port must be cut down, and fixed dates of sailing rigidly adhered to. To see to this, the Company sent Robert Nicol, aged thirty-seven, chunky, dynamic, to act as district director of its Indian Service. He had already shown his tireless energy in Italy and Spain, where he had been helping to build up the company's business for ten years past. With one assistant, he was to cover an area two-thirds the size of the United States. The company's agents, in all the principal seaports of India and Burma, reported to him. He was Glasgow-born, but he drove at his work like a Yankee.

"The crux of the thing," they had told him in the New York office, "is to get every ship unloaded and reloaded and out again in the shortest time possible."

"You're tellin' *me*?" he said, and grinned.

In January of 1940, just as the first of the Company's ships began to arrive, Bob Nicol reached India and opened his head-

quarters in Calcutta. Then, from Karachi in the west to Rangoon in the east, along five thousand miles of steaming hot coastline, he sweatingly expounded the Yankee gospel that time is money and that there are only twenty-four hours in each day.

After all, it was simple enough. There were armies of brown-skinned stevedores to be had, good workers all. But from the beginning of the world men had labored only from sunrise to sunset. A day was sixteen hours. But Bob Nicol pointed out that from sunset to sunrise there are eight hours more, eight hours going to waste. There were idle men in plenty. They leaped at the chance. After that, the American ships had the stevedores swarming over them at every hour on the clock. Until then, it had taken an average of twenty-one days to get a ship in and out of port. Now they were cleared in eleven days, and even in nine, in and out!

Furthermore, the Export ships sailed on the day and at the hour when, as it had been announced, they would sail. Those who had goods to ship wouldn't believe it, at first. They had always been able to dawdle as they pleased, while the ship waited day after day, and it had never made any difference. But not now, not with these 'strawdin'ry Americans! At the appointed hour, off the ship sailed, even if it sailed without an ounce of cargo. After this fact had been borne in on the incredulous once or twice, they believed. They got their shipments to the pier on time. This company meant what it said.

During the first six months of 1940, all the eight ships which the Company had put into its India service went to India and came back from India by way of the Suez Canal, the shortest possible route. But on June 10, 1940, Italy joined Germany in war. After that, in order to reach India, the Company's ships all had to go around the Cape of Good Hope. It was a long road. From New York to Calcutta that road stretches fourteen thousand miles . . .

The closing of the Mediterranean, instead of slowing down the Company's service to India, was shrewdly converted by the Americans into an actual betterment of the India service. During that year, the Company was launching eight new vessels, much bigger and better than the original eight which formed the India fleet. It had been intended to place most of these fine new ships in the Mediterranean trade. Now, all of them were added to the India fleet. The Mediterranean's loss was India's gain.

Than these splendid new ships, sister ships, there were no finer cargo-vessels afloat. Each one could maintain a speed of sixteen and a half knots, and better, and could make that fourteen-thousand-mile run from New York to Calcutta in less than forty days. The older ten-knot motorships required sixty days.

And with clocklike regularity the service continued—two ships sailing from the United States for India each month, two ships arriving at Indian ports each month, the rest of the tireless fleet dotting the long road, going or coming . . .

In those first two years, 1940 and 1941, they carried to India three hundred thousand tons of American products, and brought back nearly as much, to American buyers. A manufacturer in Buffalo sold his products in Bombay. A shipper in Karachi sold to a store in Kansas City . . .

Back and forth over the long road go the American ships, and, because of them, thousands who have never seen them, thousands who have never heard their names, have food to eat, and are glad.

ii

December 8, 1941. In Calcutta the news is that Japanese troops have landed in Malaya. Well, what of it? As long as England holds Singapore, there is no danger to India. Those mighty battleships, the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales*, are guarding Singapore. India in danger? Ridiculous!

In New York, a telephone call: "Export Line? That ship of yours, the Exmoor—scheduled to sail for the Red Sea tomorrow. Will she sail?"

"Sail? Of course she will sail."

December 9. News not made known: Off the Malayan coast, the Repulse and the Prince of Wales have been sent to the bottom by Japanese planes.

The Exmoor sails for Suez that day.

December 16. Another telephone call: "Export? That ship of yours that got back from India last week—the Exceller? How long before she goes out again?" The answer: "She's already gone. Going down the Bay right now. Loaded and out again, bound for Rangoon."

Is she armed? Well, she was getting a coat of gray paint at the same time that the cargo was rumbling into her holds; and her captain had been handed a .32 calibre revolver and fifty rounds of cartridges for the pistol. Oh, yes, she's armed . . .

On Christmas Day, the Exchange, under command of Captain Jacobsen, with Robert Meek as chief officer, was just approaching her anchorage in the river at Rangoon, when the air raid alarms were sounded in the city, two miles away. Soon the Jap planes appeared, flying at a great height. The mate counted eighteen of them, like tiny silver butterflies, high above the city. Those on the ship heard the detonations of the distant bombs, but none fell near them. They saw the smoke of fires spread from point to point in the town—fires which raged all that afternoon. The city's business was disrupted, and although the Exchange carried cargo for the Burma Road it was impossible to find any laborers to empty her holds. After forty-eight hours of vain attempts to do so, Captain Jacobsen gave up and took the whole cargo to Calcutta.

New Year's Day, January 1, 1942. In twenty-three days the Japanese land forces have advanced until they are now less than two hundred miles from Singapore . . .

January 15. The Japanese are now only one hundred miles from Singapore.

January 25. The *Exceller* is now coming up Rangoon River. Today the Japanese have captured the town of Parit Sulong, on the west coast of Malaya. They are only a little south of Rangoon, now.

The *Exceller* anchors. Captain Switzer goes ashore. "I've got a couple of thousand tons of trucks for China aboard," he says. "For the Burma Road. Let's get 'em moving."

The customs-house man looks at him wildly. "Don't you know what the situation is, captain?" he cries. "The Japs are only a hundred miles away, now! They'll be here any minute! Man, you can't discharge here! Everybody in Rangoon is getting out of town as fast as they can! The stevedores have all cleared out, there's not a man left on the docks! You can't unload. Take my advice, you'd better pull out while you can."

"Yes?" says the master of the *Exceller*, quietly. "Can't the city put up a fight? It's got defenses, hasn't it?"

"Defenses?" echoes the other, bitterly. "You saw those two little .30 calibre machine-guns on the pilot launch as you came up river, didn't you? *That's* all the defenses Rangoon has! Every cockeyed thing! There's not even a patrol boat!"

"Well, see if you can't round up some stevedores for me," says the captain. "I'll stick around a while."

That night the Japanese bombing planes came over Rangoon. From the *Exceller's* anchorage, two miles away, Captain Switzer saw the bombs falling and heard their explosions. There were no British planes to oppose them.

The *Exceller* waited through another day. But no stevedores could be found.

That night the planes came over again. This time, they were met by a handful of American Flying Tigers, who had flown in from the north. They shot down a Jap plane, drove the others away.

Ashore, Captain Switzer was told of eight American missionaries, five men and three women, who had managed to escape from the interior ahead of the advancing Japanese invaders. He took them on board the *Exceller*.

Next morning, the twenty-eighth of January, finding it impossible to discharge his cargo, Captain Switzer took the *Exceller* out of Rangoon. He would find discharging facilities at Calcutta; but before going there, he must first cross the Bay of Bengal to Visagapatam, eight hundred miles to the west. He would have to take off a thousand tons of the *Exceller's* cargo at Visagapatam, in order to lighten her enough for her to proceed up the shallow channel of the Hooghli River, leading to Calcutta. This done, he left Visagapatam on the fourth of February, setting his course for the mouth of the Hooghli, four hundred miles to the northeast.

He had been at sea only two hours when the *Exceller's* lookout sighted the periscope of a Japanese sub, coming in off the starboard bow. Captain Switzer rang down for full speed. Sixteen . . . seventeen . . . the indicator reached eighteen knots, and stayed there. The periscope dropped out of sight, astern.

On the same day that the *Exceller* docked at Calcutta, the seventh of February, another of the Company's ships, the *Exmoor*, was on her way home from Suez and had put in at Port Sudan, half way down the Red Sea. There she received instructions to proceed to Visagapatam and pick up three thousand tons of chrome ore to be brought to America.

The Japanese submarine might still be hanging off Visagapatam, or it might not be. Either way, it made no difference.

On the fifteenth of February, Singapore surrendered to the Japanese. England's mighty naval base, from which she had dominated the Orient for more than one hundred years, had gone down. Could the remnants of England's fleet in the Java Sea hold back the Japanese, keep their surface ships from the ports of India?

At Calcutta, the *Exceller* discharged all her cargo, reloaded, and sailed for home on the twenty-second of February. She reached home safely.

But, heading for the Indian Ocean as the *Exceller* left it, two other ships of the Company were slowly coming nearer and nearer to the Japanese. One was the *Exmoor*, the other the *Exhibitor*.

On the twenty-seventh of February, the *Exmoor* was approaching Ceylon, from the west. That day, a thousand miles to the east of Ceylon, a Japanese task force was shelling the Andaman Islands, in the Bay of Bengal, at the very doors of India. Still farther to the east, in the Java Sea, an Allied fleet—British, Dutch and American—valiant but hopelessly outnumbered, was shattered by the Japanese armada in the three days that followed. The Indian Ocean lay open . . .

March began. In Burma, the Japanese ground forces cut the railroad line that had led from Rangoon to Lashio, and the road over which American aid had gone to China. No more would go by that route. But the steamship Company could note that in the two years during which its ships had been docking at Rangoon a hundred thousand tons of American trucks and war materials had been brought to China . . .

On the eighth of March, the Japanese entered Rangoon.

On the seventeenth, the *Exmoor* reached Visagapatam. On the same day the *Exhibitor* was entering the Hooghli River, and would soon reach Calcutta.

A few days later the two ships lay at anchor side by side at Calcutta. The *Exhibitor* finished discharging her cargo from America and began taking on a return cargo. The *Exmoor* filled what space she had left. By the last day of March, both ships were ready to sail. But they were not to sail together. The *Exmoor* was to go out in a convoy of seven ships. The *Exhibitor*, whose powerful new engines gave her a speed of seventeen knots, while the convoy could do no better than ten, was to go out

alone, on the day following their departure. The two captains waved each other a cheerful goodbye.

"See you in New York!" they shouted to each other as the two ships drew apart. Why should they not be cheerful? Since the beginning of the war, four months had gone by, without a single ship belonging to the Company being lost . . .

At midnight on the first of April, the Exhibitor weighed anchor and began to move down river. She was heavy with chrome ore, vitally needed for the steel mills of America, to forge the weapons of war. And in addition to the ore, she carried in her No. 6 hatch several hundred tons of India tea, packed in one-hundred-pound chests. Such a departure, at midnight, was common enough. The pilot aboard, the ship would move out of the Calcutta locks, then anchor downstream to wait for a favorable tide before proceeding down river. The Exhibitor did this.

Her master, Captain Elbert Wilson, was a New Englander. Born in Connecticut, he had made Hartford his home for nearly fifty years, though he could seldom be there, and only for a day or two between voyages. He had been with the Company for eighteen years, one of its veteran officers. His appearance scarcely suggested the ship captain of square-rigger days. He was fastidiously neat in his dress, wore glasses, spoke in a low voice, and, in general, looked like a university professor or a scholarly corporation counsel. In his leisure hours, he was fond of reading. He found biographies of the leaders of the Southern states in the days of the American War between the States of particular interest. He regretted that he had no time for reading now.

The fact that the Exhibitor was to venture to sea unattended by any armed escort did not particularly trouble him. Although the Japanese tide seemed rolling closer and closer to the very border of India, by land, no one in Calcutta had yet heard that a Japanese fleet was anywhere at hand. The distance from the Calcutta locks to the Western Channel lightship at the mouth of the Hooghli, where he would enter the Bay of Bengal, was

one hundred and twenty-eight miles. Allowing for the anchorings between tides, he would make the lightship in forty-four hours. He had been given to understand that an escort of one or more British fighter planes would pick him up before he reached the lightship and would scout ahead of his ship, to make sure that the Bay was clear of the enemy.

By 11 o'clock on the following night, April second, the Exhibitor had got about ninety miles down the river. An incoming tide was running strongly. She anchored. The next morning, Good Friday, dawned clear, with a gentle breeze from the southeast tempering the heat of the Indian sun as it rose higher. Shortly before noon, the tide having turned, Captain Wilson gave the order to weigh anchor and proceed.

The river here is about two miles in width, but very shallow. Low sandbars are visible in its sluggish yellow flood, sand spits extend into it from both shores, and it is necessary to proceed with caution along the channel between them. The surrounding country is extremely flat, for miles upon miles, and consists mostly of rice paddies, with here and there a clump of palm trees. Beyond the eastward side of the channel, in the shallows of the broad river, is a low island called Saugur Island. It is uninhabited, except by the keeper of the small signal station at which there is a semaphore, by which ships passing up or down the river are signalled. Three miles south of this island the channel narrows to a width of only one hundred yards. On both sides of this narrow passage, known as Beaumont Gut, there are shoals and quicksands; a hurrying tide calls for careful piloting; and it is unsafe for more than one vessel at a time to attempt its passage.

Off Saugur Island, the Exhibitor observed the semaphore's signal that another vessel was preceding her into the Gut, and Captain Wilson ordered his ship's speed slowed down a little, in order not to overtake her. He lifted his glasses and could see her plainly. She was a small Greek steamer. In the hot noonday

sun he could even make out the sparkle of the wake she was kicking up astern.

About a dozen of the Exhibitor's crew were on deck, busy at their tasks. Hardy, the second mate, off duty, lounged on the boat deck, amidships. The first mate, Lief Johan Christiansen, thirty-seven years old, a brawny young fellow with thinning blond hair, joined Hardy. Christiansen, also off duty, had just finished his lunch. He had had no sleep for two days, having had to superintend the final stowage of cargo at Calcutta, and having been on watch all the previous night as the ship came down the river. He was very tired. He dropped to a seat on a cot which had been placed on the boat deck, and yawned.

A moment later the sound of a distant plane was heard. Hardy, first to spot it, remarked wonderingly :

"That's a hell of a big plane—looks like a Sunderland flying-boat. It's a four-motored job."

Christiansen left his seat on the cot and looked at the plane. Hardy might be right, the plane was perhaps a Sunderland, but it was always fun to kid Hardy, who was British born and invariably claimed that everything good was British. Christiansen pretended he didn't believe that the plane was British.

"Looks like a big Coronado to me," he said. "They make those limey Sunderlands of yours look like thirty cents."

But, to make sure, he hurried to his room and came back with his binoculars. With the glasses at his eyes, he exclaimed in a tone of surprise :

"Say, that bird's got a couple of red spots under his wings!"

"Let me have those glasses!" said Hardy hastily. Squinting at the plane, his face suddenly changed color. But, unconvinced, he muttered :

"No, those are RAF insignia. What's the matter with you, Chris, don't you know an RAF plane when you see one?"

Christiansen grabbed for the binoculars again. This time, the plane having come nearer, he made out some huge letters on

the wing, extending its entire length. Forgetting the spots on the wing-tips, he concentrated his attention on these letters.

"He's got some letters on the wing," he said slowly. "No, they aren't letters, they're numbers. Zero-dash-five-two."

And exclaimed: "He's dropped something!"

Something was, actually, falling from the plane. Christiansen's mind flashed back to an incident that had occurred a year before. He was then returning from a voyage around the world, as first officer of the freighter Exbrook. Crossing the Indian Ocean, bound for Cape Town, the Exbrook had been circled, far out at sea, by a plane. The plane dropped on the Exbrook's deck a weighted canvas bag, to which was attached a knot of British colors and a message directing the vessel to close up with British naval vessels near by, for proper identification. Christiansen thought of this as he watched the plane coming toward the Exhibitor now, and saw the object falling from the plane. Until that instant, he hadn't been alarmed. But now he knew that the the falling object was a bomb, and that the plane was the biggest Japanese plane he had ever seen—a huge Kawanishi. He lowered his glasses and dashed down the alleyway leading to his room, where he had left his steel helmet.

On the bridge, Captain Wilson had also heard the plane's drone and had turned from watching the Greek steamer ahead, to look at the plane. As it was approaching them from the north, from the direction of Calcutta, he supposed it to be a British plane. And John Gilliland, the third mate, standing beside him, agreed that it was probably the escort plane that had been promised them.

The plane passed high overhead, over the ship's starboard quarter. Then, banking steeply, it circled, passed astern of the Exhibitor, and flew off to eastward. But almost instantly it turned again and flew back, directly toward the ship. At that height, it was still difficult to distinguish the markings on its wings. Captain Wilson frowned slightly, trying to read them. The plane was

almost overhead now. Beneath one of the wings he had just made out the numbers "0-52," when, through the binoculars, he saw the first bomb dropping from the plane.

With one leap, Captain Wilson dived into the pilothouse and rang the general alarm. The Japanese bombardier had released the bomb at so great a height that it was still falling when Captain Wilson regained the bridge. The bomb, missing the ship by a breath, struck the water only twenty yards off the port quarter. Men were already at their gun stations as it exploded.

The explosion jarred the ship's stern and the rudder heavily. Below decks, most of the electric switches were thrown out. On the main propeller shaft a spring bearing cap was broken. But that was all. The steering gear of the Exhibitor was sturdy. She was still manageable.

There were fifty-eight men on board the Exhibitor—forty-six in the merchant crew, twelve in the Navy gun crew. Fifty-eight men were at their stations within fifty-eight seconds. Beside the 4-inch gun on the poop deck, there were four .50 calibre Browning machine-guns. The first mate, Christiansen, had already reached his station in command of the gun in the pillbox on the port wing of the bridge.

But even as the guns were being trained on the plane, the Jap had circled, was heading for the ship once more, and was diving at her again.

To the men in Christiansen's pillbox, it seemed as though he were diving straight at them. Although his gun was already fully manned and loaded, the mate had not fired while the Jap was circling; not wanting to waste ammunition, he was holding his fire still the plane came within effective range. From the opposite wing of the bridge, in the starboard pillbox, Ensign Bolt, the Navy gun-crew commander, shouted across to Christiansen, "Open fire! Start firing, Chris! For God's sake, Chris, fire!"

The plane was nearer the port side pillbox now. Christiansen

began firing, when the plane was at a 45-degree angle. As the plane passed overhead the mate pushed downward on the gun's handles, gripped in his outspread fists, until the muzzle was pointing straight upward. Bending his knees as he depressed the gun, his knees touched the deck. In those few seconds, the Browning had spewed six hundred shells at the plane, and the deck was littered thick with the empty shell cases, hot from the gun.

The Jap passed overhead and dropped his second bomb.

This time, he got her. The bomb fell squarely in the center of the heavy planks covering No. 6 hatch, the next to the foremost hatch. Shearing through the planks as though they were paper, it luckily struck no steel construction, for there were no bulkheads there. Through the soft chests of tea it fell, meeting nothing unyielding, and on down into the second 'tween-deck, where among more chests of tea, it exploded.

The explosion blew a three-foot hole in the starboard side of the ship, about four feet above the waterline. It blew the cross-beams of the hatch, heavy steel beams, from their sockets. It scattered the heavy planks forming the hatch cover into the air as if they had been straws. It bulged the steel deck and pierced it with flying chunks of steel scrap till it looked like the top of a salt-shaker. It bent the cargo booms, steel poles as big as telephone poles, as though they had been tin. Two men of the gun crew, stationed in the port gun pillbox aft, were blown right out of the pillbox. Their arms were burned, but they picked themselves up and ran back to the gun.

The rending force of the bomb was not its only menace. It scattered incendiary heat, as well. Within ten seconds, an inferno of fire was raging among the chests of tea.

The engine-room crew, knocked off their feet by the force of the explosion, picked themselves up and went back to what they had been doing. While they worked, they argued. Not having seen the plane, they disputed hotly. One oiler insisted they had

been torpedoed. The others were disgusted at his ignorance. How could a submarine get into those shallow waters? Impossible! One man even went on insisting that they hadn't been hit at all. It was just an internal explosion, he maintained. They argued, but they went on working. Let the deck crew take care of it. That was *their* business.

The deck crew was taking care of it. They had already got four hoses into action and were pouring four streams of water into the flames roaring up from No. 6 hold. They made jokes about having a cup of hot tea. In five minutes they had the fire already under control; but it wasn't out.

And in the meantime, the Jap plane had circled once again and was diving at the ship. When he got low enough, his machine-guns would begin chattering, sweeping the decks. But as he came in, the armed guard on the .50 calibre port after gun got him into the sights and kept their stream of fire steadily on him. Suddenly he dropped and swerved. Had the pilot been hit? If so, he had regained control of the plane; for it did not quite reach the water, but pulled up, turned, and went winging away to the east, flying very low.

Perhaps it was struggling to reach the airfield at Akyab, three hundred miles away, which the Japanese had seized and occupied eight days before. But it never got half that distance. The Exhibitor's radio operator had been working his key steadily ever since the first bomb had fallen. A British fighter plane, answering his call, had already been dispatched from Calcutta. Within the hour, it had caught up with the Jap plane, crazily wobbling on. They gave it a short burst, and it pitched downward into the sea. It was towed into Chittagong. The eight Japanese who had manned it were all dead. Some of them were already dead when the plane turned away from the Exhibitor. . . .

The Exhibitor's men continued to pour water into the burning hold and in fifteen minutes more the fire had hissed out. At a quarter to one, the ship anchored, so that an inspection of her

damage might be made. From the time the plane had first come into sight, only twenty-five minutes had passed.

"Take a look around," said the captain briefly, to his first officer. "See what the damage is."

Then happening to glance at the mate, he exclaimed: "What's the matter? Something hit you, Chris?"

Both of Christiansen's knees, below his khaki shorts, were like raw steaks, and the blood had run down his bare legs. He looked down, uttered an exclamation of surprise, then laughed.

"Oh!" he said, "I must have been kneeling on the empty shell cases, while I was firing. I never felt them!"

The mate went cautiously down into the blackened hold, where twisted beams were still hot to the touch, and flickered his flashlight over the wreckage. He came back smiling. The hole that had been torn in the ship's side was two feet wide and three long, he said; but luckily it was above the water-line and could be easily repaired.

Captain Wilson told him to take what men he needed and patch the hole. They built a box of heavy planking, big enough to extend all around the hole, lined it with burlap, fastened it securely against the ship's side, then stuffed cement into it and let the cement harden. It was all finished in a couple of hours, and the ship would be able to get back to Calcutta. The young mate grinned at the dozen men who had helped to do the job and told them to follow him up to his room. In Calcutta, before they sailed, he had managed to get a couple of bottles of Scotch. He broke them out now, and calling each man into the room in turn, he poured out a "double" for each.

They had earned it.

They remained at anchorage all through the afternoon, while the chief engineer, Healy, and his assistants went over the machinery and pronounced it without serious damage; and the deck crew cleared the decks of their litter. Strangely enough, from among the debris scattered everywhere, they picked up many

brass cartridge shells, which had formed part of the loading of the Japanese bombs. The odd thing was that the shells were stamped, "Made in the Royal Arsenal, Canada."

In the late afternoon they went back up the river, having obtained permission to return to make repairs. Good Friday was drawing to a close. The ship still lived, and all her men lived. Adjusting his glasses with precise fingers, Captain Wilson sat down to inscribe in the logbook the events of the day. He wrote:

April 3. 11:16 A.M., anchor aweigh, proceeded. 12:20 P.M., attacked by plane. One bomb dropped, landing 20 yards off port quarter. 12:20 P.M., all AA guns opened fire. 12:26 P.M., one bomb was dropped into No. 6 hatch. Fire started. Plane driven off. 12:40 P.M., fire out.

"I think that covers it," he murmured. "Yes, I think that covers it all."

But, hesitating, he saw that the entry was not quite complete. And, taking up the pencil once again, he carefully recorded the weather observation, as the immemorial custom of the sea required.

"Day ends," he noted, "partly cloudy."

* * *

The Exmoor, in company with six other vessels, had left the Calcutta docks a few hours before the Exhibitor, and was therefore well out to sea when the Exhibitor was damaged and turned back. The convoy plodded southwestward toward Madras and the island of Ceylon, a thousand miles away.

Far to the south of them, unseen by anyone, a Japanese fleet was rushing westward across the Bay of Bengal, heading also for Ceylon, at top speed. Three Japanese battleships, five aircraft carriers, long lines of cruisers and destroyers were in the huge armada.

All through Friday, all through Saturday, and all through a

second night, the long gray killers raced westward, burying themselves in spray.

Easter morning dawned. The rising sun glittered on the spray flung from their bows as they turned northward around the southern tip of Ceylon and rushed toward the sleeping city of Colombo.

From the decks of the carriers the planes rose one by one until the Easter morning was dark with their wings.

They bombed and shelled the helpless city that day. There was no one to oppose them.

When the fleet had grown tired of its pleasant play, it moved northward. Nightfall saw it clear of the northern tip of Ceylon, and through the night it steamed northeastward.

The seven merchantmen, unaware of its existence, plodded steadily closer to it through the night.

On Monday morning, the sixth of April, they saw the southward horizon ringed with enemy ships.

At the same time, the Japs saw them. The Japanese must have burst into laughter. There was no way for the seven to escape, useless for them to turn and run. The seven huddled together, waiting, waiting for Death.

Smiling, the Japanese admiral waved three of his swift cruisers to the killing. It would be good practice for their gunners. They came racing up.

On the Exmoor, Captain Ragnar Frederick Eklund, a quiet portly man, had taken his station on the bridge and was calmly watching them run toward their victims. Without raising his voice, he had already given such orders as he could. A man could only wait.

The first shell from the cruisers struck the bridge under his feet. The bridge vanished. Captain Eklund was blown to the deck, eight feet below. Bleeding and bruised, he got to his feet. The next shells ripped open the ship's sides. She began to sink. Captain Eklund, clinging to such support as he could find, dragged

himself from one end of the ship to the other, searching for any men who might be in need of help. There was none. Not a man had been seriously injured. The order that he had given at the moment the enemy was first sighted had sent all the men to their stations, and none had been trapped below. Now, seeing that his ship was doomed, he gave the order to abandon ship. But while the boats were being lowered, and while the Japanese fire still continued, he remained calmly directing his men, from his station on what was left of the bridge, until the ship's bows had settled beneath the surface and the sea had covered all the fore-deck. Then, and not till then, he left her. She was gone.

Captain Eklund, seated in the sternsheets of one of the life-boats, watched the waters swirl over the spot where she had been. Gone! A good ship!

But he had no time for thinking of what had happened to her, or of himself. There were his men to think of. He called the roll. No, not a man was lost! They were luckier than the others—all the others had been sunk, before the Japs drew away, and there had been heavy loss of life on all the others. But he had not lost a man! "We can reach land," he said quietly. "The land is not far."

He got them there, in the boats. A very quiet sort of man, Eklund.

There were others not so fortunate. A day or two after the departure of this first convoy, a second convoy left Calcutta. It consisted of eight cargo ships. They passed downstream as the Exhibitor went limping back to get repairs. No word had been received, the near presence of the Japanese fleet was not yet known. They went on out to sea.

They steamed straight into the enemy's hands, freshly bloody from his "triumph" over the defenseless. When they saw them, suddenly, it was too late.

All these eight ships were sunk.

* * *

The repairs to the Exhibitor were completed, and Captain Wilson took his ship down the river once more. By this time, the news had reached Calcutta. He knew what they might expect. At the mouth of the Hooghli he waited, while for two days a search was made by British scout planes over the sea. They came back and reported that no more Japanese warships could be seen. Captain Wilson headed for Bombay, twenty-three hundred miles away. Running at seventeen and a half knots for one hundred and thirty hours without once lessening that speed, the Exhibitor came to her anchorage at Bombay on the morning of the eighteenth of April.

Captain Wilson could not know, but would have rejoiced to hear, that at precisely that hour sixteen American planes were bombing Tokyo . . .

* * *

In June, the Exhibitor came safely into port, and safely landed her precious cargo. And there was no interruption of the voyaging to India, no matter what the hazards. Another ship took the Exmoor's place. Another followed. Another, and another, and another—

On the long road to India the Company's ships went back and forth. There couldn't be any stop. There were cargoes to be carried, a war to be won!

III

THE NUISANCE

THE TWO freight ships lay stem to stern, moored to the long pier. The dark gray paint which covered them was equally fresh on both. But their ages, beneath that paint, were wholly unlike. On the one ship, the gray paint dressed a faithful old body that had waddled back and forth across the Atlantic for twenty-three long years. She was "a Hog Islander," named the Expositor. Her new paint was like a facial lotion spread on to fill up the honestly earned wrinkles of a grandmother. But her heart was stout and her body was sound. Good as new!

The second ship, much larger than she, was maiden young. She was big, she was virgin. Never yet had she crossed the Atlantic. She, the first of all the "Liberty" ships, had slid from the shipyards into salt water only three months before, on the sixth day of December. She had been planned for peace. But the cheers that had rung out at her launching had scarcely died away, when, on the seventh day of December, the waters of Pearl Harbor ran red with American blood. Instead of being born to peace, she had been born to war.

So they dressed her, in those three months, like a bride for her maiden voyage. They put guns on her decks.

Off shore, beneath the surface of the seas, the enemy waited for her coming.

Lying there at the pier, she might well have wanted to ask the old ship beside her what it was like. The Expositor had but just

come back from India. What had she seen, what had she heard? But the old lady, the Expositor, soon departed, empty. She had suddenly had orders to load at another port. But the two ships were to meet again in a month or two, since both were bound for Russia, an even more dangerous voyage than that to India! There would be not only the lurking submarines of the wide Atlantic to dodge, but, assuming they were safely passed, there would still be the snows and ice of the north to encounter, and the merciless attacks from German ships and German planes to be endured as the convoy crawled along the Norwegian coast. Well, if the old Expositor could get there, so could the younger untried ship now left alone at her pier. They needed cargoes in Russia, Russia needed them desperately. Day after day the heavy cargo rumbled down into her holds and the heavy footsteps of men rang night and day upon her rigid decks. Maiden voyage . . . it wouldn't be easy.

The winds of late February and early March howled over her littered decks and around the pier. Townsfolk who had warm houses stayed sensibly indoors. But up and down the windswept pier limped a homeless cur, dodging from beneath the feet of the laboring stevedores, or sniffing hopefully for food—which was never found—among the pillars of the cavernous warehouse of the dock. The dog was small, and she was a lady. She had once been white, spotted with black. But now her white was gray with the dirt of the streets. She was starving, and she had known kicks and curses. She whimpered and cringed. The seamen, as sailors will, took pity on the homeless lady. They coaxed her on board, wheedled some scraps of meat in the galley from Tom Taylor, the steward, fed her until her lean ribs bulged, and washed her clean. After that, she couldn't be driven off the ship, nor did anyone try to. When the ship sailed, she sailed with it. The crew had adopted her, and she adopted the crew. There arose the question of a name for her. The ship had been christened the Zebulon B. Vance. It was too long a name for a

small lady. They cut it down. Unanimously they christened the dog Zebbie.

On the fifteenth of March they sailed. The Expositor had gone on ahead, ten days before. By the first of April they were half way across the Atlantic. She could feel the strength racing in her; and she knew, like a colt, that she could show her heels to the old mares in the convoy. But she held back, obediently. She was beginning to feel much more sure of herself now. She had heard the mates praising her. "Handles herself beautifully," the Third Officer had said, proudly. He was young enough himself—a tallish, thinnish, serious-minded young fellow whom the others called Smitty. He was not quite twenty-eight years old and had been married for less than six months. His hair was dark red, and he had a stubby red bristle on his upper lip. He didn't take much time off for sleep, and neither did the skipper, nor the chief mate, nor the second mate, nor, for the matter of that, any one of the fifty-five men on board. On top of all the other cargo there was some four hundred tons of TNT under one of the forward hatch covers, in thousands of little wooden boxes—enough to blow the whole ship to nothingness in the twinkling of an eye.

The first Sunday in April was a bright sunshiny day, after days of fog. At home, women would be going to church in their Easter finery. The third mate, Smitty, watching the convoy lumbering along in the heavy swell and keeping an eye out for periscopes, still found himself wondering what his wife would be wearing. He wished he could see for himself.

Three days later, a gale blew up and lasted for two days, building up huge seas that crashed heavily along the vessel's sides. Alleyways and quarters on the maindeck were flooded, ankle deep. In the welter of the storm, three ships out of the forty-eight in the convoy got out of control, and several others found it impossible to keep within sight of the rest. The night was as black as hell, the sea terrible. At any rate, men told them-

selves consolingly, this was no weather for any self-respecting submarine to be out in. Those of the crew who were green hands were convinced that no such storm had ever been known in the history of the north Atlantic ; but old Andy (he was all of forty), the veteran in the Third Mate's watch crew, told them soothingly that they wouldn't know what dirty weather really was until they got farther north.

But the convoy came safely into its "half way to Russia" port, after three more days of it, and even the few that had been separated from the rest came creeping in, one by one. They rested and tightened their belt-buckles for the second half of the voyage—the run for Murmansk, the running of the gantlet.

The weather was cold, bitterly cold, as they lay at anchor. The little dog, Zebbie, shivered as she trotted on her rounds of the ship. The men, in their thick jackets, couldn't bear to watch her misery. They went to work, those that were handy with a needle, and made her a little quilted jacket, warm as toast and tailored to perfection, with her name stitched neatly upon it: ZEBBIE. She strutted.

On the eighth day of their stay, sixteen more ships in convoy came in. Ten of them had previously been piloted through a night of fog and heavy rains, along a coast fringed with rocks and shoals, and among swift and treacherous tide currents, in darkness unrelieved by any beacon lights. The ship which had led those ten was the *Expositor*, an imperturbable old lady. She anchored alongside.

The captains of the two ships shook hands with each other ashore. They were veterans in the employ of the same Company. The master of the *Expositor*, Captain Julius Christoph Klepper, had been with the Line for eighteen years. Captain Guy Winfield Hudgins had officered its ships for twenty years. They knew each other well.

Captain Hudgins, forty-two years old, was a brawny man, dark-eyed, his hair a glossy black. Captain Klepper, eight years

his senior, bounced with a youthful heartiness which gave the lie to his fifty years. He had been born in Finland, in some small town of Baltic fishermen, and the poetry of Finland ran in his blood. He had been at sea since his fourteenth year. He had served on sailing-vessels for ten years. He had handled steam cargo-ships for twenty-two more. He was an authority on the efficient stowage of cargo. Because of this, and because he spoke six languages, he had been employed by the Company for the past four years in visiting its ports of call in a half-dozen countries of southern Europe, steadily bettering its service to shippers.

Called home from Europe by reason of the war, he had been chosen to command the Expositor on the difficult voyage to Murmansk. He took the bridge for the first time in four years. He had known the sea for thirty-six years.

Captain Klepper was short, but so broad of shoulder and deep of chest that he seemed even shorter than he was. Embedded like black beads in the comfortable thickness of his cheeks, his restless eyes twinkled shrewdly. He enjoyed a joke; but when the memory of some injustice swept over him he would flush to a dark crimson; his lips would suddenly be compressed to a hard line; and he would sigh. Off duty, he was fond of reciting love-songs which he himself had translated from the Spanish.

Here in his cabin he suddenly recalled one of these. He remembered where he had been when he had first read it. It was when he had been staying at the Hotel Inglaterra in the city of Seville. That was just a year ago. It was May, and the sun of Spain was hot. He remembered the words of the Spanish poet just as he had copied them that morning:

*Tiempo es oro, mujer ;
Yo no lo puedo perder
En pedir, ni en esperar!
Se mia—si lo has de ser ;
Si no—dejame marchar!
Que el tiempo es oro, mujer !*

And, half aloud, he repeated to himself the translation he had made of them :

Time is money, my girl ;
I've none of it to waste
In pleading or in hoping !
If you're mine, please say so, right now !
If not, then tell me to go !
For time is money, my girl !

The sun's going down very soon ;
But there's plenty for me yet to do ;
Time, still, for laughter or sleeping ;
Time, still, for laughter or weeping.
For while I am well and alive
There is plenty for me yet to do !

Yes, time *was* golden, he thought, as he watched the light dying out over the gray waters of the harbor. And a man must go on, while he was alive . . .

In a day or two, there was the usual conference ashore, at which the captains of all the ships which were next to go out were assembled for last orders. Captain Klepper, glancing around the long table at which fifty officers had seated themselves, could not resist the grim reflection that it was quite likely that one or two among them were already dead men. But which ones? Certainly it did not show in their faces. Smiles lighted up those quiet eyes ; their voices, as one and another chatted in low tones with his neighbor, were untroubled. A score of them were in gold braid—the Royal Navy captains and commanders who were to command the warships which were to escort the merchantmen. Captain Klepper counted sixteen American shipmasters, all, like himself, in shore clothes. He felt a little uncomfortable. But it was comforting to see another American seated close beside the genial British vice-admiral who was presiding. This was

Captain Pearson, Swedish born—Axel, that was his name—a veteran commander of American merchant ships, whom the United States War Shipping Commission was sending to be its representative at Murmansk. Next to him sat his civilian assistant, Weinstein, smiling cheerfully. These two, he knew, would be sailing on the British freighter, a big one, whose commander would act as commodore of the convoy.

Another shipmaster, an Englishman, coming in a little late, slipped into a vacant chair beside Captain Klepper. He was a hearty, solid man, in his early forties, ruddy-cheeked, good-humored. As the conference ended and the captains crowded out, the captain of the Expositor found himself side by side with this man. The Englishman held out his hand, chuckling:

"My ship's the Cape Corso," he remarked in friendly fashion by way of introducing himself. "Well, they've jolly well crammed us full of instructions, haven't they? But what I say is, we'll know more about it than they can tell us, by the time we get back, isn't that so?"

He grinned broadly, in high good humor, and Captain Klepper was about to reply in kind, when they were jostled apart. Captain Klepper never caught his name. But he knew the man's ship well. The Cape Corso was weighted deep, her cargo tanks full to the brim with gasoline, the high-octane that the Russians so desperately needed.

The convoy went out that day, the twenty-sixth day of April: more than a score of cargo ships, with destroyers and corvettes shepherding them into line. The cargo ships were formed into five columns. But the night came on foggy, the commodore's ship shifted course without its signals being seen by the ships following, and for four hours several of the convoy groped about without finding their leader. Two of them gave up the search and prudently hurried back into port. But eventually the others regained their places, and by noon the next day the convoy was two hundred miles out at sea.

But the fogs continued. Had the weather been clear, the ships were to have kept their columns a given number of cable-lengths apart; and in each column they were to keep specified distances from the ship directly ahead. Unable to see each other in the fog, each one dropped a fog-buoy astern, towing it on a thin wire cable. It was a box-like object, which, when the convoy was traveling at a fair speed, threw up a cloud of white spray, easily seen; but when the fog had made it necessary for them to move slowly, the buoy made little spray and was difficult to see. In consequence, the ships were sometimes no more than one hundred feet apart, before they loomed up on each other. A collision between ships carrying ordinary cargoes would have been serious enough; in this case, every ship was nursing its deadly load of inflammables or explosives. Sometimes they passed each other like gigantic ghosts in the gray mists, missing each other by only a few feet. When they had passed, men wiped the cold sweat from their foreheads.

They escaped each other. By noon of the second day they were four hundred miles out. Men told each other, "Ten more days to go!" The young third mate on the Zebulon B. Vance looked at the calendar. April the twenty-eighth. "Married six months today," he muttered to himself. He wished he were at home, to celebrate.

They entered, that day, an area strewn by the enemy with floating mines. The things came bobbing slowly along, horribly close before they could be seen in the mists shrouding the sea. They were like great black iron kettles, studded with prongs as long as your hand. If the ship grazed one of those horns, you were gone.

The escorting destroyers raced up to them and sank them with shell-fire, from a safe distance.

Night-time came, but no darkness came with it. The ghostly white face of the sun, faintly seen through the enshrouding mists and fog, never sank below the horizon. There was light for

twenty-four hours daily—a dim light, like the light of some underground world, a world meant for dead men to sail in. Men moved about in it uneasily. There would be no darkness to hide them from the enemy. They went on about their work, cursing at the treachery of the darkness, which had fled away in cowardice and had left them stripped of concealment.

Not even the fog was their friend. To avoid running each other down, when it thickened, the ships were blowing their whistles almost continuously. They moaned, like frightened cattle. Although they passionately wished that they might move in a complete silence, yet they must continuously advertise their whereabouts, by this hooting and bleating. How long, men asked themselves desperately, could they hope to escape discovery, if this deep-toned bellowing persisted?

They went on.

On the third day, still attended by fogs, they sighted more floating mines, many more. The watchful destroyers sank them.

The fourth day was still foggy. Early that morning, the escorting vessels were reinforced by the arrival of four more destroyers and two ten-thousand-ton cruisers, a welcome sight. There were twenty escort vessels now, large and small. But the tension among the men on the merchant ships tightened, for at noon that day they were little more than three hundred miles from the Norwegian coast, and steadily coming closer to it. They would be within range of the enemy's scouting planes at any hour.

The fifth day, May Day, the weather cleared. There were patches of blue sky. At home, children would be going out into the woods to hunt for blue violets. Here, men kept their eyes fixed on the blue sky in an agony of watchfulness. The second mate of the Zebulon B. Vance, Frank Kilcline, had watched the sky for so long, hour upon hour, day upon day, that his eyes could no longer bear the strain. A blindness seized them, and it became necessary to swathe them in bandages of gauze; he obeyed the order with bitter reluctance.

In the clear weather, the ships suddenly found themselves in the midst of one field of floating ice after another, ice fields in which small bergs floated, dazzlingly white, seamed with shadows of deep blue and green. The ships dodged among them. Now and then the icebergs growled, cracking in the sun. But in spite of the sun, the temperature was no more than eighteen degrees above zero, and a bitterly cold wind was blowing. Men's mittens froze to iron. Captain Klepper froze three fingers of one hand, the nerves themselves being frozen, so that for six months thereafter he was able to move them only painfully.

The afternoon wore on, the convoy toiled along, three hundred lookouts kept their eyes fixed on sea and sky, and three thousand men stood to their duties, grimly. By six o'clock, off to the southward, the Loefoten Islands were no more than two hundred miles away, less than an hour's flight . . .

And at six o'clock, a cry, almost like a sigh of relief, passed over the ships in procession:

"Here they come!"

There were only two planes, mere dots in the sky.

They came, and circled overhead, immensely high, far above the range of gunfire. Men were already at their posts, the alarm had instantly sounded, the gun-crews were at the guns—indeed, they had never left them, all that day—but there was nothing more to be done. Nothing but to wait for the attack.

One of the two enemy scouts circled and darted off again, returning to its base. The other remained.

Back and forth along the line of the convoy's progress it flew, always in sight, always unreachable, maddening as the black fly that clings to an animal's shoulder and cannot be shaken off. For three long hours it kept up its horrible watch. From the decks of the ships men looked up at it and shook their fists at it, in futile rage. The ships plodded on. There was nothing else to do.

These three hours of torture came to an end at last. At nine o'clock they came, the killers. There were four of them.

There was no mistaking those big black planes. They were German bombers, growing steadily nearer, and flying at a level low enough to be reached by the guns.

Instantly, amazingly, men's spirits leaped. Yells of uncontrolled delight rose from them. *Now* there would be a chance to fight back!

As the planes came within range of the escorting warships on the starboard flank of the convoy, hell broke loose. Smoke, flame and crackling thunder burst from a hundred guns. Men shouted, and no one heard.

Men who were not already at their stations were running toward them. Only the men of the engine-rooms remained below, working like grimy demons. On board the Zebulon B. Vance a tiny white object rushed here and there along the decks, dancing upon her four slender legs in a frenzy of rage. It was the dog, Zebbie. Not once did she look at the men around her—her nose was pointed upwards, her eyes fixed on the planes overhead. She snarled at them. Her shrill barks hurled defiance at them. She was swearing like a fishwife.

The four planes, rocking in the puffs of the anti-aircraft shells bursting around them, hurdled the curtain of defensive fire. The plane farthest to the east and therefore nearest to the head of the convoy carried torpedoes as well as bombs. But its crew, their courage shaken by the unexpected ferocity of the fire, released their torpedoes wildly and too soon. They fell harmlessly. Circling back after it had crossed the convoy, this plane prepared to drop its bombs. It was not given time. Shells from countless guns struck it simultaneously, it burst, it rocketed downward in flames. The sea hissed, and swallowed it.

On the poop-deck of the Zebulon B. Vance the crew of one of the .50 calibre guns was in command of the ship's first mate, young Cushman. If ever there was a living embodiment of three hundred years of Yankee maritime history it was in him. His blood came straight from that Robert Cushman who sailed in

the Mayflower in 1620 and who had fathered a line of Yankee mariners. Young Austin Dryden Cushman, thirty-two years old, Massachusetts born, the grandson and great-great-grandson of Yankee ship-captains, was born to the sea. His grandfather, owner and master of a Gloucester fishing-schooner, took the boy on a cruise to the Grand Banks when he was five years old. At nineteen, he had become a ship's officer with the same Company he still served. Now thirty-two, he had known the sea for twenty-seven years . . .

The second German plane was heading straight for his ship.

It began its dive. Cushman heard someone yell, a yell of sheer rejoicing that the scrap was on. Afterwards, he realized that it was he himself who had shouted.

Cushman himself pointed the gun and began firing. The air became filled with violent sound. Men did not hear. The rapid bursts hammered them.

The plane went over the ship's stern, directly over the gun, scarcely one hundred feet overhead. The tattoo of the guns followed it. Its bombs did not fall.

Clouds of smoke from the guns of a score of ships drifted overhead and the plane vanished momentarily in this haze.

It reappeared, farther away, having wheeled and begun to head for home. As it came out of the clouds Cushman saw it burst into flames. Trailing smoke, it staggered on for half a mile, then dropped its bombs, crazily. It was already outside the convoy lines. Then it, too, plunged downward.

Men danced, yelling deliriously. But the terrific chattering and thundering of the guns went on. The third German plane was circling over the ships. Among the rest, the 3.5 gun on the fo'c'sle of the Zebulon B. Vance was firing at it. Suddenly the plane turned frantically and began to struggle like a wounded bird. But it drooped lower and lower, dropped to port of the convoy, overturning as it struck the sea. Its wreckage drifted toward the ships, and as the Zebulon B. Vance passed by it the

third mate noted that only its landing-wheels remained visible above the water.

Suddenly all the firing ceased abruptly. The fourth German plane had swerved away and had disappeared to the northward. It was all over.

Men looked at each other in amazement. It was all over, and they were untouched! Words burst from them in a stream, they babbled. Smith, the third mate, stared at his wristwatch in bewilderment. The fight had lasted, he had been sure, for fully a half hour; and yet this watch of his insisted that from the moment when the planes were first sighted until the last had vanished only four minutes had elapsed! The mate, Cushman, stared with equal unbelief at the empty cartridge shells which had been ejected from his gun. In that interval between the beginning of the bomber's dive and its final collapse, an interval which had seemed to pass over him with the speed of lightning, he had fired seventy-five rounds.

From the bridge, Captain Hudgins regarded his ship and his men with an immense satisfaction. Ship and men had come through.

The black-and-white terrier, Zebbie, who had remained on the bridge throughout the encounter, without once ceasing her yaps of defiance at the planes, now gave one short bark of endorsement, her private "All Clear" signal, and slid down the companionway to congratulate her friends, the crew. The men hailed her with shouts of pride.

The convoy shook itself together and went on. There was no relaxing of watchfulness. This had ended only the fifth day of the voyage. Seven more days still remained to be faced. When would the planes come again? The next eighteen hours brought no answer to that torturing question, but they did bring threats of a new danger.

This was from underneath, not from the skies. Not one hour of the eighteen passed without the rumble and jar of depth

charges dropped by the destroyers darting around the convoy. It was plain that undersea wolves were stubbornly following the convoy. Not once did they break through the cordon; but they gave sleepless men no rest, either that night or next day.

From four in the afternoon to eleven o'clock that night a lone plane floated above them. The tension on nerves grew tighter, as hour after hour dragged on, tightening to a breaking-point. With faces upturned to that mocking speck in the sky, men shook their fists at it and cursed it sobbingly. How could its gas tanks hold enough for this unending flight, they asked themselves. Bitterness possessed them. "If that plane can do it," they cried in desperate wonder, "why can't some of ours come out here just as well?"

At about half-past eleven that night the plane headed south and disappeared. It had gone to summon the killers.

The hour of waiting for them to come seemed interminable.

Midnight dragged by. The night remained almost as bright as day. The ships were now scarcely two hundred miles from the Norwegian coast. Ships' bells struck the half hour. The planes appeared, coming up from the south.

There were five of them.

Looking upward from the bridge of the Expositor, Captain Klepper saw the planes winging over the ships to starboard of him. A torpedo plunged downward from the plane nearest him. It began streaking toward the ship, at right angles to its course, but a little ahead of it. Captain Klepper sighed.

The torpedo passed ahead of the Expositor's bow by the distance of a biscuit-toss. Captain Klepper's eyes followed it as it went on. The next ship to his left, separated from the Expositor by a narrow lane of water no more than three hundred yards in width, was the Cape Corso, the British freighter whose captain had sat next to him at the conference table only a week before. The captain who had said jovially that they would all know more about this business by the time they got back.

The torpedo had crossed that lane of water in that instant of remembrance.

Captain Klepper, frozen at the sight, instantly realized that it would strike the Cape Corso a little abaft the waist, at Number 4 hold. And he sensed, rather than saw, the plane that had loosed it, which had now passed over the Expositor, flying low, while the guns of his ship and those of all the ships near him were enveloping the plane in a storm of fire.

The plane was over the Cape Corso now, and beyond it. As it passed over, it had released two bombs. They fell beyond the ship. The plane burst into flame. And at the same instant the torpedo struck.

The world stood still. Then there came a great rumble, like the muffled rumble of a depth-charge exploding deep below the surface. It threw men backwards, on the deck of the Expositor. Then Captain Klepper saw the square opening of the Cape Corso's No. 4 hatch flash out dazzling white, like a great square mirror that had caught a blinding flash of sunlight. The cordite had exploded and, the gasoline with it, the ship's entire cargo.

There was no loud sound. There was only a rushing breath, like the sound of a mighty wind, as there erupted from the incandescent hold a gigantic flame, enveloping the ship from the afterdeck to her bow. Then the bow rose in the air and the ship sank, stern first. The enormous flame still wrapped the bow as it hung for a moment in air. Then it hissed out, as the ship vanished. In thirty seconds the place where she had been was empty. Captain Klepper stared down at the smooth surface of the sea in dazed unbelief. There was not even so much as a matchbox left to be seen.

He shook his head, and gave his attention to the business ahead of him. The Expositor, steaming ahead, had no time to glance back. But within a few seconds after the Expositor had passed on, Captain Hudgins, on the bridge of the Zebulon B. Vance, the next ship in line, came opposite the spot where the

Cape Corso had gone down; and what he saw remained to trouble his memory for long afterward.

The swirling waters which had been empty when the Expositor passed by them were now dotted with black objects on which there were pinpoints of red sparks. Captain Hudgins instantly guessed what they were. He recalled that British merchant-seamen had been supplied with an item of life-saving equipment which at that time had not yet been issued to American seamen: this was a tiny electric bulb-socket fastened to the collar of the suit. Its red bulb was screwed loosely into the socket, at ordinary times; but when disaster to a ship made it necessary for a man to plunge into the water, it needed no more than the fraction of a second for the seaman's fingers to give an additional turn to the bulb, which would then light up. In darkness, a rescuing boat would be guided to such survivors by the red gleam. These floating dark objects which Captain Hudgins now saw were men from the Cape Corso, who had plunged beneath the water, and who had now emerged again upon the surface.

But as his ship drew nearer to them, passing so close that he could look almost directly down upon them, Captain Hudgins plainly saw the upturned faces of these men. The red light threw its crimson flush over each upturned face. These were not living men. They were dead men.

His brain reeled, as the full significance of the ghastly miracle flashed through it. The destruction of the Cape Corso had been so swift, instantaneous, that not a man on board her could possibly have had time to lift his fingers to the bulb and twist it into life. They had not had time to jump, they had been thrown into the air, already dead . . . And yet the red lights now shone upon their sightless upward staring eyes, as the bodies drifted past.

* * *

The increasing tumult of the guns violently recalled him from that dazed reflection. More planes were overhead. On the Ex-

positor, Captain Klepper had seen the first of the four remaining planes swoop low over the British freighter Jutland, heading the third column in the convoy, whose captain was commodore of the convoy. The plane dropped its bombs. They missed, but, a moment later, an aerial torpedo struck the ship. A second plane dropped a bomb as it flew over the Botavon, the vice-commodore's command. It hit her forward on the starboard side. She began to settle slowly by the head. But almost at the same moment the enemy plane was hit and plunged to its death in flames. It had turned completely over as it struck the water, and floated with its great wheels in air.

A plane rushed by the Zebulon B. Vance, its dark wings scarcely higher than the bridge of the ship, and a hail of fire from the ships nearest her swept horizontally across her decks. Captain Hudgins saw the gleam of the tracer bullets passing like flitting shadows just over his head. He crossed the deck on his hands and knees and stood up again when the plane had passed. His second officer, Kilcline, whose bandaged eyes had seen nothing of the fight, suddenly could endure inaction no longer. He ripped the bandages from his head. "To hell with this!" he cried. "Let me see the bastards!"

On the torpedoed Jutland, ahead, men looking down from the bridge could see her cargo, through the gaping hole torn in her afterdeck. She had begun to sink by the stern. Boats were being lowered and men were pouring into them. As they pushed away from the stricken ship, explosions shook her, one after another. The smokestack crumbled away, then the bridge vanished. Next came a rumbling sound inside the ship. The bows of the ship reared themselves upward, convulsively, then the whole ship sank slowly.

Among the escorting ships was a small trawler, equipped as a rescue-ship. She was already rushing to pick up the men in the boats and from the water as the cargo ships passed by. The cries of the men in the water rang in their ears.

Around the skirts of the convoy rushed the destroyers and corvettes. They had seen, or thought they saw, the periscopes of lurking submarines. They dropped depth-charges. The sides of the cargo ships shook with the recurrent rumblings. Below decks, their engine-room crews worked on, unable to guess at what moment steam-pipes would be wrenched loose by the concussions, to shower them with scalding death.

And the rattle of the guns continued overhead. Two planes were still there. From the first moment of the attack, to avoid the falling bombs and torpedoes, the ships had moved ahead by fits and jerks—now at full speed, now stopping short, now frantically turning to right, then to left, the wheelmen spinning the wheel with desperate strength, the bridge officers ringing bewildering changes of speed to the engine rooms. This, through twenty minutes. They had seemed like twenty hours. And the fantastic stoppings and dartings still continued, and in spite of them all the convoy somehow managed to keep its columns nearly as they were.

One by one they drew past the crippled Botavon, which had settled so deep that her decks were now awash. All her men had been picked up by the rescue trawler. After the convoy passed, a destroyer came back and put her out of her misery with shell fire.

Endlessly, it seemed, the firing at the planes continued. Then it suddenly ceased. Both planes had been shot down.

The attack was over.

Captain Klepper, in a voice that he scarcely recognized as his own, assured himself that his ship and all his men had come through untouched. In the past three days he had at no time slept more than an hour; and for the past twenty-four hours he had not slept at all. For ten hours, he had not even left the bridge. Entering his cabin, he sat down heavily on the edge of the couch beside his bed, and, without troubling even to remove his snow-encrusted overcoat, stared with unseeing eyes at a

calendar pinned to the wall. "The Cape Corso," he muttered. "What was that captain's name?" Sitting erect, he shut his eyes and was instantly asleep.

In ten minutes he shook himself awake and returned to the bridge. "Have to take the weight off your feet once in a while," he observed to the mate, not apologetically. "Better go get some sleep, mister." It was one in the morning.

On board the Zebulon B. Vance a small black-and-white dog ran excitedly to and fro, everywhere collecting the flatteries of men who were trembling with exhaustion. "It's a wonder you've got any voice left, Zebbie," they told her. "You been barkin' at them planes steady, for an hour!"

Smith, the third mate, leaned over to pat her. He was about to speak, then bit his lip. He could not trust himself to speak. His lips trembled.

No man wanted to be by himself. They all talked, loudly, excitedly, no one listening to anyone else. They boasted shrilly of how they had shot down the planes. "Got four out of five of 'em!" they crowed, over and over. "That'll teach 'em!"

The morning came, as leaden gray as the night. That there was no difference between night and day, and that the gray sea and the gray sky were continuously the same seemed to some a final burden of injustice. Snow flurries whitened the icy decks. And at five in the morning, while the white face of the sun peered idiotically down upon them from the north, they gritted their teeth. The plane had reappeared.

Its pilot was unhurried. For eight long hours he played with them, a mocking game of hide-and-seek. At times he disappeared in the gray cloud banks, only to come back just as the men drew breaths of relief. Their profane opinions varied. Sometimes they damned him for a yellow coward, afraid to come down, after the drubbing they had given his unspeakable brothers of the day before. Sometimes they cursed him for this merciless

prolongation of their suffering. Anything but this, this waiting . . .

At half-past one in the afternoon, the bombers came. This time there were only three of them. And they no longer seemed to have any stomach for the fight. One dropped its load of bombs even before it was over any ship, then turned to flee. But it had come too close, nevertheless, and the convoy's gunners winged it. It began to settle lower and lower as it flew. The second managed to dart in and drop one bomb within a few feet of one of the escorting corvettes, and the bomb's explosion hurled spray over the slim racer from stem to stern. Gunfire overtook this plane also, as it banked in its panic effort to escape, and it went down in a long slant to the water, like the first.

The third plane did not even try to hit any cargo ship or armed vessel of the escort. It dived straight for the smallest vessel of them all, the tiny trawler that had picked up, after the previous attack, the crews of the Jutland and the Botavon. The defenceless little rescue ship, a midget beside the others, and well apart from them, seemed to the Nazi pilot easy prey. Young Cushman, watching through his glass from the deck of the Zebulon B. Vance, felt himself grow cold with fury as the plane raced toward the tiny boat where a hundred unarmed men were huddled.

He saw the plane poise over its victim and the bombs come out. Lazily they fell, the whole stickful; one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five. His dry lips counted soundlessly. He saw them strike alongside the very counter of the trawler, and as one bomb they exploded.

He saw the stubby little ship rise bodily out of the water. He saw her whole length in the air, keel dry. He saw her flung forward for a full forty feet before she dropped again.

Then the plane swooped over her, with its machine guns chattering.

Cushman dropped the binoculars to the length of their lanyard,

and a bellow of fierce exultation burst from him. The plane had been hit. It disintegrated before his eyes.

Then he looked again at the trawler. It was moving sturdily on, unhurt.

Signals blinked anxiously from the escort command to the trawler. "Are you damaged?" they asked. "Have you any casualties?"

One flag alone rose slowly on the signal-halyards of the little trawler in reply. It was a checkerboard of blue and white squares. Bluntly it answered:

"No!"

The convoy kept on, its lines unbroken.

* * *

Men who had not closed their eyes through three days and nights now got an hour or two of sleep. The morning came, the eighth day, the cold more bitter than ever. The sea mists froze into fine snow. Frost whitened the eyebrows of the unshaven men, froze on their bearded lips.

Drift ice began to appear in greater expanse. The ships picked their way among ice-floes a dozen feet thick. They changed course again and again, hunting for lanes of open water. But no enemy planes came that day. About noon, they sighted three Russian destroyers, which had come out to look for them. They themselves were closed around by ice; and it was an hour before they came up to the convoy, the salt spray frozen thick upon their decks. Later that afternoon the convoy came again to open water, in which Nazi subs may have been lurking; for the circling destroyers dropped their depth-bombs again and again. But the crews began, nevertheless, to breathe more easily, for the skies were still empty of planes.

Heavy snow began falling that evening. The ships moved through it in ghostly procession. The men's spirits rose. Blanketed in that whirling whiteness, they felt still more safe from the

planes. All through the night and all through the day that followed the welcome snows fell steadily. The decks were piled deep with ice and snow. The men on lookout stations were standing like statues of white. At the end of that endless day, the ninth day of the voyage, they entered the wide mouth of the bay at whose end was Murmansk, their goal; and, proceeding with infinite caution through the blinding gusts of snow, at two o'clock in the morning of the tenth day they anchored to await their pilots. They had bettered their expected time by two days.

Fifty days had passed since the Americans had left home.

The Expositor had been sixty days out. She had left home on the fifth of March. This was the sixth of May.

In the driving snow, a covey of speedy Russian naval launches came out to the anchored ships that morning and distributed among them the pilots who were to guide them over the few remaining miles. It was a slow and excruciatingly nervous ordeal, these last few hours. Not only had the Russians mined the bay, leaving only a narrow, crooked and complicated channel for passage, but German planes had repeatedly dropped floating mines, so that the fairway was cleared only by constant sweeping. The snow was blinding. The ships moved in single file, creeping. A feverish impatience to be rid of those boxes of TNT possessed every man. Endurance had reached its last notch.

But by afternoon they had reached the docks. It was still snowing, snowing a white hell. There was not much to be seen—only a huddle of low roofs, snow-covered, on a flat expanse surrounded by low hills. The mooring lines were scarcely fast, before they began removing the dreadful boxes, in a cold frenzy of haste. Unending lines of tattered and grinning Russian soldiers, men on furlough from the front, who considered it was a rest to work as stevedores, moved off the ships with "death in wooden boxes" on their shoulders.

A curious and laughable ignorance fired the brain of the little dog which had shared in all the past dangers of the Zebulon B.

Vance. She was unable to understand this business, it bewildered her, outraged her. To what purpose had she guarded the ship and all its crew through all those days of horror, driving off those evil birds that had fluttered their wings over them, only to have the precious cargo now taken away from them by these tattered strangers? She thought her heart must burst. She charged them, singlehanded. Snapping, snarling, baring her teeth, she charged them again and again. It was no use. Each time, some seaman would yank her back, laughing uproariously. Somebody whom she had thought was her friend . . .

They finally had to lock her up, undefeated, in the warmth of the galley. They guffawed, and crowded around to smother her with proud attentions.

They remained in Murmansk for fifteen days. By the end of the second day after their arrival all of the TNT had been put ashore. On the very next day German planes came over the harbor and the town. From then on, they came daily. Smith, the third mate, kept his own private tally of their number. In twelve days he counted forty-eight raids. Whenever an alert was sounded, the ship's little dog, Zebbie, was always the first on deck in the scramble to answer the call to "General quarters." She hurled her barkings into the air, along with the guns. "Raises holy hell, don't she?" asked the first mate, proudly, finding time to pat her between one burst of gunfire and the next. On their fourth day alongside the dock, after five alerts had been sounded that day, the sixth brought them to their guns just as fourteen enemy bombers came over. Three of the planes left the formation to head directly for the dock where the Zebulon B. Vance was lying. They dropped six bombs. One struck a shop building in the town. The other five were dropped straight at the ship, whose guns were already blazing at the planes. Two of the bombs struck the water no more than a hundred feet from the ship's bows. Two fell fifty feet astern of her. Cushman, the mate, looking up at the fifth, saw it falling straight toward No. 2 hatch, from a

height of a thousand feet. Perhaps a faint breeze swayed it after that. It struck the dock, thirty feet from the ship's side.

Earth and flying cobblestones rained down on the foredeck. Packing-cases on the pier leaped up as high as the tops of the box-cars standing near by. Fragments of shrapnel rattled against the steel side of the ship. A gaping hole appeared by magic in the solid dock, a hole thirty feet long and fifteen feet in depth, where the bomb had fallen. The three planes, struck by the unremitting fire of the guns, were already whirling downward toward the waters of the bay. The third mate, Smitty, picking himself up from the bridge-deck, looked down at the foredeck in a daze. He shook himself together.

"Enough dirt piled up down there," he muttered, "to start a farm."

In the week that followed they finished discharging their cargo and took on some Russian cargo in its stead, while the enemy planes came and came again, daily. On the twenty-first of May, a returning convoy having been made up, they started for home. In eight days they had left the arctic seas behind them, not without having passed through repeated attacks by submarines and by planes. In a friendly port, they rested for twelve days, while a new and larger convoy was being formed. June was half over when they started westward again. They were attacked by submarines again and again as they crossed the Atlantic. On the twenty-fourth of July, having survived one hundred and thirty-two days in which not one day was without its threat of death, the Zebulon B. Vance reached home. The first of her voyages since her launching was done.

Her men came wearily down the side-ladder to the pier. A little black-and-white dog made her way down, along with them. She lifted her dainty nose, sniffed superciliously, and scampered back up the ladder to the decks where she would always be queen. Trotting around them, she got under everyone's feet. Men of the shore gang, coming on board, wondered why no one in

the ship's crew ever had anything for her but a pat and a kind word. One of the shore gang, finding her underfoot, kicked her roughly to one side.

He was astonished to find his collar seized in an iron grip, a grip that yanked him around, breathless. An extremely quiet and extremely disquieting voice, cold as a Russian winter, emerged from the seaman who was throttling him.

"Lay off that dog, understand?" said the voice icily. "Lay off, or I'll knock your ears off."

"Okay, okay," mumbled the man who hadn't been on the Murmansk run, backing away in terror. "But she's a damn nuisance, ain't she? What's the idea?"

"You wouldn't know," said the seaman, softly.

IV

THE DROTTNINGHOLM JOB

THERE WAS one task in the early months of the war which called for the services of the Company's men in posts of responsibility ashore, and which involved neither any one of the Company's vessels nor any of its men at sea. This was the task of sending home to Europe those Germans and Italians in the belligerent American republics and whose immediate return was requested by their governments; and of bringing home to the Americas those of their representatives in Europe whose duties had kept them there until then.

The diplomatic negotiations bringing about this exchange were commenced as soon as war was declared, in December; they occupied four months, continuing through April. Switzerland's Foreign Office acted as the intermediary for the communications with Germany and Italy. Portugal agreed to the use of Lisbon as the port of entrance and exit.

Lisbon having been chosen, the American Export Lines were again requested, as they had been in the case of the West Point, to supervise the berthing arrangements at New York and at Lisbon. When the war began, the Company's staff at Lisbon had at once been recalled to New York, but it was now arranged to return them to Lisbon for this particular task. Since American ships could no longer be used, the United States government negotiated with Sweden and chartered the liner Drottningholm, of the Swedish-American Line; and she was sent to New York

from her home port, Gothenberg, under command of Captain Siegfried Ericsson, manned with her own crew. Her cabins could accommodate 950 persons. Almost three times this number were to be sent home from the Americas, and the Drottningholm was prepared to make three voyages. About two thousand were to be brought westward. The Company assigned ten of its men to handle the arrangements for all these, nearly five thousand.

On the twenty-eighth of April, three of these ten men—Charley Kalloch, who had been the Company's director in Europe; Fred Citriolo and Lewis Hart—left New York by plane for Lisbon. In New York, George Gaede, "Bill" Schaefer and John Bailey, of the Company's passenger department, toiled again over the passenger lists supplied them by the State Department and over the preliminaries of the Drottningholm's departure, as they had toiled in the case of the West Point, ten months before. The Company's pier in Jersey City, where the Drottningholm lay, was roped off. When the trains bringing the German and Italian diplomats and their staffs rolled in from Virginia Hot Springs and other places where they had been interned since the declaration of war, Secret Service men admitted no newspaperman or any unaccredited visitor to the pier. The Company's chief baggagemaster, "Jack" Morrissey, supervised the handling of the mountains of luggage which the passengers had brought with them. Ten thousand pieces of baggage came with the 956 passengers; but, according to Frederick B. Lyon, of the State Department, whom Secretary Hull had assigned as protocol officer to accompany the ship, Morrissey was "quite unruffled." Four other Company men also sailed with the ship—Albert Sykes, as special purser; Francis Ahearn, his assistant; Tommy Brett; and Victor Vecchy, who was to join Kalloch, Hart and Citriolo for the work to be done in Lisbon. The Drottningholm left the Jersey City pier on the afternoon of the seventh of May.

Kalloch, Citriolo and Hart had reached Lisbon by plane late on the evening of April thirtieth. It was midnight when they reached the Hotel Tivoli, to which they had already cabled for rooms. There were no rooms. There were no rooms in all Lisbon, the clerk said. But he finally offered them an attic room in the hotel annex, a room with a sloping roof, a hand-basin washstand: the only bath was on the floor below. Hart and Citriolo took it, while Kalloch went on to the Hotel Aviz, where a cot was put up for him in a sitting-room. Leaving their bags in their room, Citriolo and Hart went out at one in the morning to get a bite to eat. It was a lucky expedition. In the restaurant, they encountered one of the Portuguese clerks who had been employed in the Company's Lisbon office. They told him their business in Lisbon and said that additional clerks would be needed—in a hurry!

"See if you can round up any," they told him, "and bring them around tomorrow morning. We'll be at the American consulate."

They had been in Lisbon less than an hour, and already the wheels were rolling.

In the morning they paid their respects to the American Minister, Bert Fish, at the Legation in the Rua Sacramento da Lapa, and hurried on to the consulate, in the Avenida da Liberdade, the Minister having requested the consul-general, Samuel Hamilton Wiley, to provide the necessary quarters and assistance. Mr. Wiley placed part of the first floor and all of the second floor of the consulate at their disposal. Some of the members of legation staffs in other European cities had already arrived in Lisbon, to await the Drottningholm, and a dozen or more of these Americans were assigned to assist Kalloch, Hart and Citriolo, under the direction of Cloyce Huston, who had been Second Secretary of Legations at Bucharest. Several of the former clerks in the Company's offices had already put in an appearance, in response to the hurry call sent out at midnight, and these

were promptly hired. They set to work with a staff of more than twenty persons, including legation and consulate staff, all highly competent, that very day. Ten days later, as the trains from every country in Europe brought more and more North Americans and Latin-Americans into Lisbon, and the day of the Drottningholm's arrival grew nearer, this force was increased by additions from the Lisbon legation and consulate staffs, until nearly forty persons were employed.

With the preliminary lists of names supplied them from Washington, they began an attempt to assign berths on board the Drottningholm for her return voyage. For this voyage, priority was to be given to members of the Foreign Service, North American and Latin-American, and to news correspondents no longer permitted to remain in the belligerent countries. But almost immediately American civilians began arriving in Lisbon from Spain, France and Switzerland, and with those already in Portugal began to besiege the consulate with appeals to be included on the Drottningholm's cabin list. Useless to explain to them that it was impossible to allot space to them before it was known how many of the diplomatic corps must be provided for—they wanted to get out of Europe, quick, and why couldn't they go right away?

The first train load from Italy came in on the tenth of May, bringing civilians as well as diplomatic staffs, and including some Americans from Greece. As the trains from Germany began to arrive, bringing people from Norway, Denmark, Austria, Bulgaria, Poland and occupied France, the pressure on the consulate grew even worse. Trains had to be met at the station and their American passengers bundled into buses to be taken to hotels and pensions where accommodations had been found for them in advance. As for the diplomatic staffs, a senior member of each delegation was asked to form a small committee to gather the information, concerning each member of the delegation, which was needed before the space on shipboard could be as-

signed. The rest, civilians, were asked to call at the consulate to supply this information about themselves—a necessary step, in any case, to obtain their visas.

The harassed and hard-working Export men and their associates were forced to set up a sort of factory "production line," to handle the growing flood of applicants. The applicants were routed through five successive stages. First, as they entered the consulate, they presented their passports and identifying papers for inspection by the consular staff. Second, they were ushered to the physician who vaccinated them—for every outgoing person was obliged to submit to vaccination. Third, they went on to the room in which, at one of a dozen desks, they filled out the forms applying for passage and for the purser's information. Fourth, having filled out these forms, they went on into another and a larger room, where the consulate staff inquired as to their financial needs. Almost without exception, every American civilian who had arrived from an enemy-occupied country arrived without a dollar left to him, and the case of those arriving from other countries was little better. In the case of American nationals and their relatives, though these relatives might be aliens, it was arranged to advance them money to cover their enforced stay in Lisbon and on the voyage. Those whose friends or relatives in America had not prepaid their passage-money were permitted to sign promissory notes for the needed amount and to draw from funds advanced by the State Department. Fifth, and finally, they entered still another room, where the Export men and their assistants checked the status of each applicant, gathered up their passports and the forms they had filled out, and placed them upon the list for the issuance of the ship tickets. This done, they could be told only to return to their lodgings and wait for their tickets.

In the last room of all, the Export men settled down to study the information thus collected, and to draw up the cabin berthing lists for the twentieth—and, they hoped devoutly, the last—time.

A new anxiety now confronted them—in allotting the cabins among diplomatic officials of a dozen different ranks and of a dozen different countries, could they possibly escape from making blunders—blunders that would offend the touchy and self-important, if there were any such? But their fears proved groundless, thanks to their own forethought, which had invoked the aid of the committees from each incoming delegation, and the counsel of the State Department's representative, Frederick Lyon, who had arrived on the Drottningholm on the sixteenth of May. At the top of the list of home-bound Americans was placed Admiral Leahy, who had been United States Ambassador at Vichy. He was the only Ambassador. The others, Ministers, *chargés d'affaires*, secretaries, consuls, attaches of various sorts, all fell into the procession rigidly prescribed by protocol. There wasn't a murmur, and the weary Export men heaved a sigh of profound relief.

Trial booking-lists had been drawn up in this room day after day, only to be changed almost daily, as new information came in. Fred Citriolo and his assistants drew up these running lists, as Kalloch and Hart turned the names over to him. One day might bring the word that So-and-so was expected to arrive from such-and-such a place, in time for the sailing. Down went his name, assigned to a specific cabin. The next day might bring word that So-and-so could not arrive in time. It wasn't just a matter of crossing his name off the list—the whole list, from beginning to end, might have to be revised, the whole bracketing of cabin-mates reshuffled. Patience, patience, and once again patience! But at last the final listing was accomplished, a bundle of nearly fifty pages, with twenty names to the page, and then forty sets of these pages had to be made upon the antiquated hectograph machine in the consulate. Sets for the ship's purser, Sykes. Sets for the Portuguese Foreign Office. Sets for the Lisbon Chief of Police, for use up to the time of embarkation. Sets for the American Legation, for the State Department, and for the Foreign Offices

of the dozen or more Latin-American nations whose citizens and representatives had been booked thereon.

American newspaper and radio news correspondents who had been held in Germany since the declaration of war, more than five months, were among those for whom room was found on the Drottningholm's first westward sailing. These included Glen M. Stadler, Clinton B. Conger, F. C. Oechsner, and Jack M. Fleischer, representing the United Press; Louis O. Lochner, Angus Thuerner and Alvin Steinkopf, of the Associated Press; Herbert Mathews and Harrison Parsons, of the New York Times; Edward John Haffel, of the New York Herald Tribune; Hugo Speck, International News Service; Jean A. Graffis, of Acme Pictures; Ernest Fischer, for the National Broadcasting Company; Paul Charles Fischer and John Paul Dickson, radio reporters. Mrs. Parsons and Mrs. Lochner accompanied their husbands. And besides these from Germany was Frank Stevens, who had represented the United Press in Rumania.

Others, coming from Italy, were Camille Cianfarra, who had there represented the New York Times, Harold Denny, Reynolds Packard, David T. Collins, Richard Massock, and Livingston Pomeroy.

With these correspondents came Louis Patrick Harl, who had been a representative of the International News Service in Germany. But just as the Drottningholm was about to cast off her mooring lines and depart for New York, this man's Nazi allegiance boiled over and he rushed down the gangplank, wildly shouting. He escaped to Germany.

The Drottningholm sailed for New York on the twenty-second of May, with 908 passengers. Among them were the diplomatic representatives of Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Salvador, Venezuela and the United States. Arriving in New York on June first, the Drottningholm sailed again for Lisbon on the third of June, this time with 963 Axis nationals. The allotting

of space to American civilians still in Lisbon had gone on without a pause; and as soon as the Drottningholm had disembarked her German and Italian passengers the Americans were sent on board. She sailed for New York with 942 passengers on the twenty-second of June. The Export men, Sykes, Ahearn, Morrissey and Brett, who had come with her, went back with her.

The great white ship, her sides marked with the blue and yellow flag of Sweden, ploughed swiftly westward. When she docked at the Export piers in Jersey City the Company men found that although the Drottningholm would be sailing again in another two weeks, and would take still more Axis nationals—eight hundred and fifteen of them this time—she wouldn't be going to Lisbon. She would be sailing direct for her home port, Gothenberg, in Sweden, and wouldn't be back.



THE EXPRESS

ON THE ninth of July, 1942, the United Press correspondent at Lourenço Marques, the seaport capital of Mozambique, Portuguese East Africa, began a despatch to his New York office with these words:

"An American vessel was torpedoed at midnight on June 29 about two hundred miles off Cape Corrientes on the east coast of Mozambique, and fourteen of the crew are missing."

The censor permitted him to list the names of the missing seamen, but not to disclose the name of the vessel. That fourteen were missing was true, at that time. It was also true, as the despatch stated, that one of the ship's lifeboats was also missing. But the missing men were not in the missing lifeboat. Only one man was in that boat.

* * *

The ship was the *Express*, of the American Export Lines.

The *Express* was a splendid cargo-carrier, one of the eight sister ships owned and operated by the Company. Her displacement was fifteen thousand tons, and she could carry nearly seven thousand. Her engines drove her regularly at sixteen and a half knots, and she was powered to do well over eighteen. She was virtually a new ship, having been launched at Quincy, Massachusetts, on March 9, 1940, and had been in commission less than two years. In the first six months of the war she had completed two voyages to India, and was now making her third.

She had safely delivered a valuable cargo of munitions at Bombay, and had taken on board an equally valuable cargo for the return voyage. Her officers and crew numbered fifty-five men.

The master of the Express was one of the famous captains in the Company's employ, Captain Kuhne (pronounced "Coony"). Captain Bill Kuhne was a jolly red-faced man, powerfully built, of great driving force, his eyes merry. He took a gusty delight in eating, and, in fact, in everything he did. He was fifty-four years old, had been a deep-water sailor since he was fourteen, and had been with the Company for twenty years, ranking as one of its oldest captains in point of service. He immensely enjoyed conversation, when off duty; had an inexhaustible fund of jolly stories to tell: and, in the days when he had taken passengers to the Mediterranean, had made friends of all of them. He had an astonishing memory for faces, and invariably ran into some old acquaintance in whatever port he might find himself. He remembered literally thousands. He was married, and had a son twenty-five years old, "Young Bill," who was even brawnier than his father and was mate on another of the Company's ships. His wife and daughter lived in West New Brighton, and Captain Kuhne hurried for the Staten Island ferryboat that would take him to them, as soon as his ship had docked. That half-hour on the ferryboat always seemed to him the longest voyage he had ever known.

A curious incident, apparently of trivial importance, occurred just before the Express left New York for Bombay. Captain Kuhne, coming on board just before the departure, happened to notice a twelve-gallon breaker of drinking water standing on the pier at the foot of the ship's ladder. "What's that doing there?" he asked sharply. "Why hasn't it been brought on board?"

"It isn't ours, captain," answered the bos'n. "We've got all our supplies. That's probably there for the shore gang, sir."

"Well, everything on this pier is consigned to the Express,"

retorted the captain, chuckling. "The shore gang can get more, and we can't. Bring it on board."

It was brought on board and placed in one of the lifeboats. It was still there when the Express started homeward from Bombay, in the middle of June.

Captain Kuhne had forgotten the incident completely.

The Express went out from Bombay into the teeth of a southwest monsoon. She was traveling alone, not in convoy, and Captain Kuhne had hoped that he could keep her at her usual sixteen knots or better. But the head-on gale—he was steering southwest for the entrance of the Mozambique Channel—grew so violent that he reluctantly ordered her speed reduced. On the third day, she averaged little more than six knots, instead of sixteen and a half, making only 156 miles in the twenty-four hours, instead of the 400 he had hoped for. Nor was the sea content merely with slowing the vessel down. It heaped itself up and struck at her savagely. One terrific wave ripped off the forward gun platform. Another battered in the No. 1 hatch. Half of the starboard rail was torn away. Both of the lifeboats, which had been swung out on their davits in readiness for instant lowering if the ship were torpedoed, had to be decked again to keep them from being crushed by the seas leaping at them from beneath. This sort of thing went on for three days. But on the fourth day with the Equator behind them, the monsoon moderated somewhat and the Express began to gather speed once more. Through Friday and Saturday she rushed southward through the Mozambique Channel.

At daybreak on Sunday, the twenty-ninth of June, when the ship was three hundred miles eastward of Beira, on the African coast, and an equal distance from the western coast of Madagascar, a ship was sighted far to the eastward, on the horizon. At that distance, only her two tall masts and her smokestack were visible, but it could be seen that she was steering toward the north. In a half hour she had passed out of sight.

But, four or five hours later, at 10 in the morning, Captain Kuhne observed with surprise that the same two masts and smokestack were again visible on the horizon, astern, and to port. It was evident that she had reversed her course and was now following the Express. Apparently she was making top speed, for within half an hour her hull was visible. She was heading directly for the Express. It seemed more than likely that she was an enemy raider.

Captain Kuhne was taking no chances. He at once rang down to the engine-room to give the Express everything she had in her boilers. Jumping to eighteen knots, she ran away from the suspicious-looking pursuer, which, in another hour and a half, had again dropped out of sight astern, below the horizon. Easing the Express down to seventeen knots, Captain Kuhne put another two hundred miles behind her in the next twelve hours. As night fell, the sea began again to work up. Blacked out, the ship ran on through the moonlit night and the roughening seas. Shortly before midnight, the captain, who had been on the bridge continuously for eighteen hours, went to his room. Still steering southwestward, they were now little more than one hundred miles from the African coast, he reflected. He stripped, and lay down to catch a few winks of sleep.

Into his sleep came the sound of what seemed to be gunfire. He woke, leaped from his bed, and in his khaki shorts ran out upon deck. Off to starboard, overhead, the red light of a flare that had been fired by the unseen enemy to outline the ship was just flying away. And at the same moment the torpedo struck.

Captain Kuhne instinctively glanced at the watch strapped to his wrist. It was thirty-two minutes past midnight. A bright moon shone in the sky.

The first torpedo had struck on the starboard side, aft. Five seconds later, a second torpedo found its mark, striking between No. 5 and No. 6 hatches. Both had hit just at the waterline, close together. The sea rushed like a cataract into the enormous holes

torn by the explosion, and the Express began sinking with a sickening rapidity. Flames burst from beneath the shattered hatches and weirdly lighted the scene.

"Get both lifeboats away!" ordered the captain. As the first mate jumped to carry out the order, Captain Kuhne glanced again at his wrist-watch. It was 12:34.

The ship was settling fast by the stern. Already the water had reached the after end of the boat deck.

"Abandon ship!" shouted the captain. Hurrying from the bridge to No. 1 lifeboat, he saw that one of the falls was jammed. He ran back to his room, swept up the belt on which his sheath knife and revolver were strapped, and, returning to the boat, handed the knife to a seaman, shouting to him to slash the tangled ropes and let the boat drop. Once more he returned to the bridge, to make sure that all were gone.

The bridge was empty. He threw open the door of the radio-man's room, where, a minute ago, the operator had been sending out the SOS which the captain had ordered. He was gone. Captain Kuhne ran back to his own room, with a fleeting thought that he might retrieve some personal belongings. But immediately he realized that he could not delay. He had time only to clutch up his fountain-pen—a treasured possession, given to him by men who had served under him. Thrusting it into the pocket of his shorts, he ran out again on deck.

Every man had gone. Looking over the rail, he saw that both lifeboats were in the water. A smaller boat, a yawl, hardly a dozen feet long, had also been put overboard, and was bobbing alongside the ship. Captain Kuhne put his hand upon a rope dangling from the rail and was about to slide down it to the boat. But the next wave tossed the little yawl upwards, rammed its bow against the boat-deck, and overturned it. Captain Kuhne dropped the rope and jumped.

How far down he went, he didn't know. Suddenly he was on the surface again. The ship loomed over him. He thought at once,

"I've got to get away from her. If I don't, she'll pull me under, with her, when she goes down."

He turned and swam away from the ship. When he had taken a dozen strokes, rising and falling in the running sea, he looked back. The Express had lifted her bows straight up into the air. Only half of the ship remained visible. Her entire after part, from waist to stern, was already under water. The forward half towered in air, a dark pinnacle against the night sky.

And suddenly she went down, very swiftly, as if a hand had pulled her underneath.

Captain Kuhne drew a deep breath and struck out again. He thought himself alone in the sea.

A wave lifted him and showed him the little yawl, floating near by. It was floating bottomside up.

He swam over to it and attempted to right it by pushing upwards on the gunwale which was under water. It rolled over. He tried to climb into it, but as he did so it capsized once more, and again he found himself struggling in the water.

Something underneath the water clutched at his foot. He kicked at it desperately and wrenched himself free of it. Then, turning, he saw another swimmer, and his momentary panic vanished. A heavy plank, part of a hatch cover, came floating by. The captain reached it and pushed it over to the drowning man. The man managed to get himself on the plank, clung to it, and drifted out of sight.

Then, through minutes which seemed hours, Captain Kuhne looked in vain for the overturned boat. When he at last had found it again, he was too exhausted to try to right it and climb into it. He merely clung to its sides, content that he could keep his head above water with its help. But how long would it be before his grip would weaken and he would be washed away?

Minutes more had passed, when he heard voices close at hand. He turned and saw one of the lifeboats, filled with men, making its way slowly toward him. Boat and men were like shadows in

the night. They came up to him; hands reached down and dragged him into the boat.

"Are there any more in the water?" he gasped. "Listen for the whistles."

They listened, and heard a faint whistle at a distance. Pulling toward the sound, they came upon a floating box, to which two men were clinging. They hauled them in and listened again.

After a while they heard faint shoutings, blown to them on the wind. They rowed in that direction. In a few minutes they reached the second lifeboat. Three men stood in it. The boat, heavy with water, was unmanageable.

"We'll throw you a rope and take you in tow," shouted the captain. "Don't get too close to us—if you crush this boat we'll *all* be gone."

They took the water-heavy boat in tow and bent to their oars again. For an hour the two lifeboats moved about in a vain search for other men who might have survived. They saw nothing. They shouted, and heard no answering cry.

Heavy hearted, they at last gave up the useless search. A count of their own number was taken. There were thirty-eight men in the one lifeboat, three in the other. That meant that fourteen men were still missing. It seemed certain that all fourteen had been drowned.

Grimly, Captain Kuhne gave the order to step the mast and hoist sail. He set the course west. The land, he judged, was about one hundred and twenty miles away. A strong wind was blowing from the southeast, a favoring wind. If it held fresh, they should reach land in three days, perhaps in less.

But it was impossible to progress as long as they continued to drag the second boat, full of water, behind them. They gave up that attempt in half an hour. Sail was lowered, the two boats came closer to each other, and Captain Kuhne ordered the three men in the waterlogged boat to leave it and swim over to the

first. They were hauled aboard, the useless boat was cast adrift, and they started on their way once more.

The wind that drove them on was chillingly cold. The captain, having turned the tiller over to one of the mates, sat shivering in his water-soaked shirt and shorts and wondered what the morning would bring. As soon as daylight came, he would take an inventory of the boat's supplies of food and water.

It was now about four o'clock in the morning. Three hours had gone by since the ship was torpedoed: three hours lay ahead, before daylight.

* * *

Sunrise. Sunrise and the sea.

When the man lying on the dark box-like raft first lifted his head he saw only the dark tossing shapes of the seas rising and falling. A numb bewilderment seized him. How had he come here?

He tried to rise. Something held him down. He ran his hand cautiously, gropingly, along his side and his numbed fingers touched a wet rope. It encircled his body. For a moment he wondered stupidly how it had got there. Then, still in a half daze, he remembered dully that he himself had passed it around his waist to keep himself from being washed off the raft.

Suddenly panic seized him. Untangling himself from the rope with frenzied haste, he leaped to his feet and stared wildly around. The raft rose sluggishly on a wave; the man slipped and fell, grabbing frantically at the rope, and digging his fingernails into the hard slippery planks. He clung there, breathing hoarsely.

When he had got his breath, he tried it again, this time with more caution. The rope was his friend. He clung to it. He got to his knees. He looked around. The dark waves inclined their heads to him as they ran past, in majestic mockery.

The red rim of the sun came up on the horizon. Then it shot

upwards, a red ball. The whole sky brightened. The clouded east was glorious with gold.

Desperately the man's eyes swept the whole circle of the horizon. There was nothing to be seen but the hurrying crests and hollows of the restless seas, wherever he turned his eyes. He was utterly alone.

He shouted. The wind whipped the shout from his lips and whisked it away into nothingness.

Six hours before, he had been a seaman on board a ship named the Express. At midnight, off duty, he had been asleep in his bunk. All that day the ship had been steaming southward in the Mozambique Channel, a hundred miles or more from the eastern coast of Africa. A fine big ship, with a good crew. There had been fifty-five men aboard her.

And yet he was here. One man, alone in an empty sea. The ship, where was she? The men, where were they?

Useless to ask. They were gone, ship, ship and shipmates alike, and he alone lived. As the enormity of his loneliness burst upon him, he turned cold with fear.

Wearily guarding himself against the slow lunges of the heavy raft, he sat up and began to fish in the cloudy waters of his memory for the last moments upon shipboard. Slowly it came back to him.

There had been that terrible crash which had hurled him from his bunk and wakened him to the wild confusion of the torpedoed ship. He had got to the deck, somehow, he could not now remember how. He had seen the red glare from the hatches, had staggered back from the fierce heat, though he had been fifty feet from the flames. He had seen the ship's stern already under water, and sinking fast. Terrified, he had no choice. The ship was doomed. He jumped.

He must have found the raft, and climbed upon it. But he must have lost consciousness, then, for he could remember nothing after that.

He was alone, in the immensity of the sea. All, all, ship and men, were gone! The fearful thought staggered him, and he groaned.

He could not know that the men in the lifeboat had hunted vainly in the darkness for such as might still be living. He could not know that, having given up that search, and having hoisted sail three hours ago, the boat and its forty-one men were now ten miles distant, far out of sight.

He shook his head. He forced himself to stop thinking about his shipmates. There was one thing, and one thing only, upon which he must concentrate every atom of his strength—the searching of the empty seas for some approaching ship that would save him.

He held his head up, and watched. He never relaxed his watchfulness.

And a miracle happened. It was not long before he saw the empty lifeboat.

He had not seen it at once, because, heavy with the weight of the water it had shipped, it was lying low in the water. He saw it when it rose heavily on a wave.

His heart leaped.

The boat was scarcely fifty yards away from his raft, and dead ahead. The fresh wind from the southeast, moving the raft slightly more rapidly than it moved the heavy boat, was closing the distance between them inch by inch. But it seemed an eternity to the man. He paddled, shouted, prayed and cursed, in agonies of hope and despair.

And at last his outstretched hand gripped the lifeboat's gunwale. He threw himself in. As he floundered to his feet his face shone with new hope. He shook his clenched fist at the sea.

"Now, goddam you!" he shouted at it. "I'll lick you yet!"

He was thirty-seven years old. He meant to live a long time, still.

On board the ship, he had been rated neither as engine-room

man nor as seaman. He had been signed on as "deck maintenance man," whose job it was to keep equipment in smooth running order, and to make repairs. He was handy with tools. He was used to depending on himself.

One glance at the condition of the boat showed him what he must do first, and how quickly he must act. The boat was so deep with water that the next wave might fill it and sink it. He splashed to the nearest thwart and seized the bucket fastened beneath it. Frantically, he began bailing.

It was like trying to empty a bath tub with a teaspoon. But he never stopped. He dipped, flung, dipped, flung, staggering as the boat lurched under him, bucketful after bucketful, until his arms ached and his lungs were bursting and the whole sea danced crazily before his eyes. He worked on, panting, a madman. The sun rose higher and glittered on the showers of water flung out to leeward. Sweat poured down him. He worked on, fell to his knees with exhaustion, and got up again.

He intended to live.

And, in the course of hours, he got the boat dry. It rode buoyantly. He rested a little, then explored his new dominion. He found food in the lockers, food enough for thirty men. He found fresh water in the breakers, water enough to last him a month. It might be days before a passing vessel sighted him, but he would be all right. The sea wouldn't get him. Not this time!

He forgot the sun.

* * *

Twenty miles away, the other lifeboat was running westward before the quartering wind from the southeast. In it were crowded forty-one men.

Sleep had been impossible. No one had room to stretch out. A few had huddled on the bottom of the boat, their knees under their chins; the rest crowded the thwarts, sagging against each other. All were soaked through, to the bone. Only six blankets

were in the boat. Captain Kuhne wrapped one around the shoulders of the man at the tiller and distributed the others to those who needed them most. Morning found the whole company haggard, weary, cold, but uncomplaining. They even joked.

Captain Kuhne took stock of the boat's supplies. The stores of food were plentiful—malted-milk tablets, chocolate, pemmican, graham crackers. He estimated that three and a half ounces of pemmican could be allowed to each man daily, assuming that the coast would be reached within a week. The two waterbreakers, holding sixteen gallons each, were full. Two breakers were the regular equipment of each lifeboat. But to the captain's surprise, he found a third breaker in the boat, one holding twelve gallons.

"This is lucky!" he exclaimed. "Who had sense enough to put this one in, too?"

"Why, *you* did, captain," said the bos'n. "Don't you remember you found it there on the pier in Jersey City, just before we sailed, and told me to bring it on board?"

Captain Kuhne roared. "I told you we'd need it more than they did on shore," he chuckled. "Wait till I tell them this!"

He parceled out the rations twice a day—two graham crackers, a malted-milk tablet, and three ounces of water for breakfast, and the pemmican, one milk tablet, and another three ounces of water in the evening.

With the rising of the sun the temperature shot upward. In forty minutes it climbed forty degrees. The men were all bare-headed. The sun beat down upon their heads mercilessly. Its heat was like that of a giant burning-glass focussed upon them. They writhed beneath it, unable to devise shelter from its malignancy.

They rejoiced when the sky became overcast with clouds.

The wind continued, and the boat heaved on and on over the empty sea, the bodies of the men swaying with its rolling

and pitching. They clung to the thwarts, to the gunwales, and to each other.

On the second day, July the first, the captain reduced the water ration at the morning allotment, but doled out an extra ounce of water in the evening, with the ration of pemmican. The pemmican increased thirst.

By the third day, the nerves of the men had begun to fray from their lack of sleep, the heat of the day, the cramped positions in which they were held, hour upon hour. Until now, they had tried to joke. But now their bodily and mental weariness showed itself in the petty squabbings which broke out between them on the slightest provocation. One man might accidentally jostle another. The other's anger would flare up instantly. Again and again, throughout the day, Captain Kuhne put a stop to these quarrels.

Somehow they got through that day and the next, without any man cracking completely. Some of the men were beginning to suffer painfully from sunburn. The captain's naked legs and shoulders were puffed with blisters. The men's thirst was increasing. Through their puffed lips they talked of cold drinks they would get as soon as they reached land—pitchers of ice water, tumblers of orange juice. "You know what I'm going to have?" one would say. "Oh, for Christ's sake, shut up!" another would interrupt, angrily. "Pipe down!" And they would stare at the glittering sea in silence, through swollen eyelids.

Captain Kuhne thought of the ferry to Staten Island. There was a refreshment stand on that ferryboat, where you could buy paper cups full to the brim with ice-cold orange juice. Orange juice, ice cold. Orange juice, ice cold . . . He shook his head savagely. It wasn't safe to think of things like that, over and over. He drove it from his mind.

The fifth morning dawned. It was the morning of the Fourth of July.

"All right, boys!" the captain shouted cheerfully. "Holiday

today, you know! Take the day off! Go anywhere you damn please! Everybody gets shore leave!"

That got a laugh from the weary men. All through the day before, not a man had laughed.

Captain Kuhne dug into a locker. He pulled out three rocket flares, and held them up before the men.

"We'll have the usual fireworks, too," he announced, grinning through his swollen lips. "What's New York got that we haven't got?"

Their eyes brightened as they watched him set them off, one by one, and as each one soared into the gray dawn they gave a cheer.

At seven o'clock the captain served breakfast—three ounces of water, instead of two and a half, and one malted-milk tablet.

But in the forenoon the captain was forced to take back his promise that there need be no work that day. The wind had died down. The lugsail flapped uselessly. It was necessary to get out the oars, to keep the boat moving. Two men pulled at each of the long oars, in shifts of an hour.

At noon, as a special celebration, and to give the men a brief rest from rowing, the captain gave each one a chocolate tablet and three extra ounces of water.

They took up the oars again at one o'clock. The high sun beat down upon the hatless men. They rowed on, doggedly, and in silence.

Two hours later, in mid-afternoon, the lookouts suddenly shouted. Excited cries burst from everyone. Off to the south they had sighted what seemed to be another lifeboat, with men in it, who were rowing. They rowed eagerly toward it. But as they drew close to it their hopes died out again. It was only a floating piece of wreckage from some other ship.

As they rowed dejectedly away from it, a dark shape glided past them, underneath the water. It was a tiger shark, fully twenty-five feet long.

At nightfall, they concluded their Fourth of July celebration. Each man got half a can of pemmican, a chocolate drop, and three ounces of water. Having dined, they began rowing again.

At about half past eight, a breeze sprang up from the south-east, freshening fast. The oars were eagerly shipped, the sail trimmed, and the boat began to move like a thing alive. Its bow scattered sprays of silver, phosphorescent glory, as it moved.

They sailed throughout the moonlit night. At about 2 o'clock in the morning, a whale rose suddenly, a few feet astern of the boat, scattering showers of phosphorescence from his sides. He dived, rose again near the boat's bows, and for five minutes played around the boat, throwing cascades of glittering silver around him. Men who had sunk into an exhausted stupor roused themselves, to watch the enchanting spectacle. And when the giant visitor had at last left them, they talked excitedly among themselves for an hour or more, marveling at that wonderful visitor from the deeps. The captain listened, thinking gratefully of that whale—it had relaxed the misery of the men as nothing else had done.

All the next day, their sixth day in the open boat, they sailed, still seeing nothing but the empty sea. In the afternoon they saw floating in the water a few pieces of seaweed, and hoped that this meant that land was near. At nightfall the wind was freshening strong, and the sea was rising dangerously.

At about one o'clock on the seventh morning, the sixth of July, they caught the glimmer of a light, low on the horizon. It was not a star, it was moving. Land was somewhere near!

At earliest daylight, it became visible. They kept on, and by nine o'clock they could see it plainly—a long sandy beach, fringing a forest. There was no sign of any habitation. When they had landed, they found fourteen natives, black men, armed with bows and arrows, knives and long-handled hatchets, watching them from the shadow of the woods. But they were friendly.

Two days later, guided by the Portuguese administrator of the

province, who had been fetched from a distant village, they started along the coast for the nearest port. Young Van der Linde, the third mate, who had made his way through thirty miles of jungle to bring help, could no longer walk. Captain Kuhne's feet were too swollen to stand on. Both men were carried upon litters.

In different ships, the men came home. They were taken to Cape Town and waited there for another ship. In Cape Town, a man came up to them, smiling.

It was their shipmate, one of the fourteen men they had given up for lost.

They stared at him, not believing their own eyes.

"You went down with the ship!" they cried.

"Not me," he said. "I got into one of the boats. I was in that boat for ten days and then a Dutch tanker came along and picked me up and brought me here."

"Anyone else with you in the boat?" they asked.

"No," he answered. "I was by myself."

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VI

A SHORE JOB TO DO

ON SUNDAY, the twelfth of July, the little Portuguese freighter *Inharrime* came into the port of Lourenço Marques, Portuguese East Africa. Crowding along her rail as she steamed into the bay, were Captain "Bill" Kuhne and his forty men from the torpedoed *Express*, whom the *Inharrime* had brought from Inhambane, two hundred miles up the coast.

Captain "Bill" Kuhne, in spite of his blisters and bandages, looked at the town with lively interest as they neared the docks. His thoughts raced back thirty-two years, to the days when he had been a youngster of twenty-two, and had been mate of a Dutch freighter that had plied between New York and New Zealand, and had put in at Lourenço Marques. A wild youngster he had been in those days, he reflected, smiling. That was in 1910, the year when Portugal overthrew its monarchy and proclaimed a republic. Here in this Portuguese colony they had hoisted the flag of the Republic over the old fort; and he, coming ashore from his ship, had marched with the cheering rebels and had helped them run up that flag, and had drunk beer with them to celebrate. Ah, well, that was a long time ago! Even the old fort was no longer there. Its mud walls had been leveled years ago. And in place of the drowsy village that he had known, here was the thriving modern port, and the town of seventy thousand people, spreading over the low hill overlooking the harbor. He wondered if he would find anyone he knew . . .

He limped down the companion-ladder, and his foot had

scarcely touched the pier, when he heard them shouting, the good old American voices. "Bill! Hey, Bill!" He whirled around, and there he saw them—the two men from the New York offices of the American Export Lines, his own company. They were pushing toward him through the crowd of Portuguese, grinning like Cheshire cats. Husky fellows. Solid guys. John MacGowan and Bob Nicol. Captain Kuhne's mouth fell open in utter astonishment.

"For the love of Mike!" he gasped. "What in the name of God are *you* doing here?"

MacGowan had been the Company's assistant director in Europe; Nicol had been the Company's district director for India. But when he had last seen them, months before, they had been at their desks in New York.

"How the hell did you get *here*?" he repeated, amazed.

"The office heard you were in a little trouble, so they flew us out here," they told him, grinning. "Get your men fixed up, and we'll tell you more."

"First, I've got to see the American consul," said the captain. "Where's the consulate?"

"In his house. We'll take you there," they said. "Come along."

At the consulate, Captain Kuhne asked where he might find lodgings for his forty men. There were none to be had; but Preston, the consul, was a man who had won the respect of the Portuguese. He produced the lodgings out of a hat.

This done, MacGowan and Nicol carted the captain off to their own rooms, in a building called a hotel. Sitting on the edge of the bed, they unfolded their story.

"Look, Bill," they told him. "There are fifteen hundred Americans, men, women and children, on their way here now from Japan. They've been interned by the Japanese. It's up to us to see they get on home, from here."

The captain's sun-puffed eyes widened. "By jiminee!" he shouted. "That's wonderful!"

Two ships were coming from Japan. A third vessel, the Gripsholm, was coming from the United States, bringing fifteen hundred Japanese. The exchange was to be made here in Lourenço Marques.

The American government had selected the Company to manage the job.

One hundred and thirty million Americans wanted that job done. A man might be proud indeed to have a share in it.

It was the State Department's accomplishment, to begin with. From the day following Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war with Japan, the State Department had been working tirelessly to procure the release of the American civilians caught in Japan, in exchange for the Japanese whose government wished released from American custody. The negotiations had required months, and infinite patience. The port of Lourenço Marques, the neutral port most nearly midway between Japan and America, was agreed upon, with the sanction of the Portuguese government, as the point at which the exchange was to be made. The United States government chartered from Sweden, another neutral, the ship which was to take the Japanese from the United States to Lourenço Marques. The ship was the capacious Swedish-American passenger liner, the Gripsholm, of eighteen thousand tons.

This done, the State Department called in the American Export Lines to superintend the actual working out of the exchange, at Lourenço Marques. The Company sent MacGowan and Nicol to Washington, to confer with the State Department. When its approval had been given to the general scheme, the two men were sent by plane to Lourenço Marques. They had arrived there on the third of July. Meanwhile the Gripsholm had sailed from the Company's piers in New Jersey, with the fifteen hundred Japanese nationals, including diplomatic and consular representatives, aboard. The ship was due to arrive on

the twentieth of July. Nicol and MacGowan had sixteen days before them in which to work out all details.

They hurried to call upon the American consul, Austin Roe Preston, first of all. The consul liked the Portuguese and the Portuguese liked him. MacGowan and Nicol told each other, gratefully, that he was a gift from the gods. Preston smoothed the way for them in a hundred places. They would have got nowhere without him, they told themselves. First, he arranged conferences with the special delegate of the Portuguese government, courteous Dr. Laborinho, and with the Captain of the Port, Captain Ribeiro. Then they inspected the quay, which was more than a mile long, on an arm of Delagoa Bay, where the exchange ships were to dock. They studied every inch of the ground, mapped it, pored over the deck plans and cabin plans of the three ships concerned—for Japan was sending two ships, to be docked alongside the Gripsholm. They would have liked to wall off the whole area with a high board fence, to keep everything roped off. There wasn't a fence, and it was impossible to build one; so they hit on a better idea. There were railroad tracks paralleling the dock. "Will the railroad company kindly shunt a line of empty box-cars along this track, to make a fence?" they asked. "But certainly!" answered the courteous Portuguese. It would be done. They wanted porters to handle the baggage from the ships. They would be provided. The Company's agents and the railroad people would provide them. Fifteen hundred tickets for the returning American evacuees had to be prepared. MacGowan and Nicol prepared them. Baggage labels had to be printed. They were printed. There wasn't a minute of any day when there wasn't some new detail to be ironed out.

And there was never a hitch. They took their plans, one by one, as they worked them out, to the good Dr. Laborinho, who, having approved them, submitted them in turn to the Italian consul, who acted for the Japanese government. They were accepted by the Italian without alteration, from first to last.

In the first week, things moved slowly. After that, they scarcely knew what it was to sleep. And they, Nicol and MacGowan, were still up to their ears in these endless details when, out of the blue, stepped Captain Bill Kuhne, like the sun-blackened ghost of an indestructible mariner, popping up out of Davy Jones's locker.

He was still shaken from his experience, and when he tried to speak of the men who had gone down with the Express, his voice choked.

"Look here," he asked them, "why can't I send my crew on home and stay here to help?"

"You get into bed, Bill," they told him. "Get some rest, then we'll see."

They got him into bed, and then they made a bee-line for the consul's office. Through the consul they sent off a cable in code to the State Department.

The answering cable cheered them considerably. They went and shook it under the captain's nose.

"It's okay, captain," they crowed. "No more of this soft and luxurious life of the sea for *you*, till we get this job done. We're going to show you what work really is, for once in your life. Stick with us, and we'll get you a priority to go home by plane."

Captain Kuhne brightened up. That plane idea sounded pretty good. He gave his First Officer a letter of introduction to one of his seven thousand old friends, the American consul at Cape Town, and on Wednesday the forty men of the Express departed for home. He was rejoiced to hear afterwards that the consul and his wife handed them Cape Town on a platter.

But after Nicol and MacGowan had introduced him to their job, he wasn't so sure that he had made a good bargain. They worked him (and themselves) from dawn until midnight of the following day, every day. He came to think almost longingly of the days in the open boat. These two birds had no more mercy than Simon Legree.

Never once absent from their minds, at any hour of the day or night, was the disquieting thought that the least spark might set off an explosion. There were to be landed at one spot three thousand people, half of whom were of one nation, half from another nation, and those two nations were at war. All would be crowded into a few square yards of the quay. They set themselves grimly to see to it that by no chance would the two groups meet. A single hot word, from some embittered American, a single insult from some arrogant Jap, and the spark might flame. There must be no mistake in their planning. Nothing less than perfection would suffice.

To begin with, the problem would have been simple if all the passengers could be landed from the three ships and the two groups kept in separate quarters ashore, before exchanging quarters on shipboard. But Lourenço Marques was completely lacking in such housing. The passengers from Japan and the passengers from America must stream directly from one ship to another, debarking and embarking from all three ships simultaneously, and still the two streams must not touch each other. It was a problem to baffle Euclid himself.

They worked it out, and waited for the ships to arrive.

The Gripsholm was the first to come in; the day was Monday, the twentieth of July; they were ready for her. That whole area, a section of the waterfront two thousand feet in length, had been blocked off. The big white ship with the words SWEDEN and DIPLOMAT painted on her sides was warped in as the three men had planned it and moored exactly in the center of the long quay.

At noon on Wednesday, the twenty-second of July, the two ships from Japan arrived. One was the Conte Verde, of the Italian Line, chartered by Italy to her ally. She was as big as the Gripsholm, but had less cabin space, and carried six hundred Americans. The other was the Asama Maru. She brought nine hundred Americans.

The Conte Verde was moored forward of the Gripsholm, bow to bow, the two bows almost touching. The Asama Maru was moored aft of the Gripsholm, stern to stern.

MacGowan and Nicol had been studying, for days past, the list of names which the State Department had sent them. Try as it might, the State Department had been able to get from Tokyo nothing but the initials of any passenger's first name. There was no telling whether "J. Jones" was John Jones or Julia Jones. There was no telling whether "J. Jones" was six years old, a child, or a grown person. Nicol and MacGowan struggled, sweated, and swore. The names had to be sorted out and assigned to cabin berths in the Gripsholm, somehow; and they prayed that they might guess right.

There were listed, for example, four persons named Anderson. Could they all be assigned to share one cabin? It turned out that not one of them was related to the other. There were seventeen persons named Chow. Was this Momma and Poppa, asked the captain bitterly, and fifteen little Chows? Who could know they formed *three* separate families?

The two ships from Japan had scarcely stopped moving when MacGowan and Nicol sent on board them to ask for proper lists. When they got them, they groaned. Comparing them with the list from which they had been working, a single glance showed them that all their cabin assignments must be scrapped. It would all have to be done over again!

"Look at this!" spluttered Captain Kuhne, peering over their shoulders. "Here's this 'M. Walsh' on the first list. 'Michael' Walsh, I thought, of course; and I assigned him to a cabin with five other men. And now look at this—it's 'Sister Mary Walsh' and she's got to go with the rest of the nuns! I can go home by plane with you, says you—I wish I'd gone home before I ever laid eyes on you!"

"Forget it!" said Nicol. "Get to work!"

They had had ten hours' sleep in the last five days.

Official copies of the new lists had been requested—one copy was needed for each of the half dozen diplomatic officials concerned. But the ships were in, and the Japanese hadn't got the copies ready. In order to get these copies, and their own, the two Americans had hurriedly to engage a battery of typists—the typists and their machines were commandeered in taxis from their jobs in town—whom they set to work on board the two ships from Japan, copying a list borrowed from the ship's pursers. The rattle of the typewriters went furiously on all that afternoon, while the fifteen hundred American passengers looked longingly down at the docks and impatiently wondered how soon they would be allowed to go to the Gripsholm.

When they did at last get to the Gripsholm they wondered why there was still confusion about their cabin allotments. If they had only known, it was the stubbornness of the Japanese captain of the *Asama Maru* that was to blame.

All Wednesday afternoon, while the typists were working madly at copying the lists, a conference was in progress. At the conference table sat Nicol and MacGowan, Dr. Laborinho, the Swiss and Spanish officials who had traveled with the three ships, the commander of the Gripsholm—Captain Ericsson—and the captain of the *Conte Verde*. The captain of the *Asama Maru* haughtily refused to attend. He sent his purser in his place.

The two Americans proposed that the transfer should take place on the Friday morning. An interval of at least one day would be needed, they pointed out.

The two Spaniards, the two Swiss, and the Portuguese all nodded agreement. A full day would certainly be needed for these preparations, they said. That was plain.

The Japanese purser shook his head. "So sorry," he purred. "Must begin transfer tomorrow afternoon. Captain's orders."

The Americans swallowed their exasperation. "Will you go

back to the captain," they asked, "and explain our point? Surely he will agree."

The purser went back to his ship. He was gone for twenty minutes. When he came back he shook his head.

"So sorry," he repeated. "Captain says all Americans must go off his ship in the afternoon, thank you."

"In the afternoon?" they exclaimed. "May we ask why?"

The purser bowed. "Captain's orders," he explained, blandly.

Their pleading continued for five hours. At intervals the purser would carry a message to the Asama's captain, who still disdainfully refused to honor the conference with his presence. And from each visit the purser would return with the same stubborn refusal of the captain to permit the united opinion of ten men to sway him from his whim.

At six o'clock, MacGowan and Nicol got to their feet. They were through. "Tell your captain," they said to the Japanese purser, "that the exchange must take place in the morning at eight o'clock, *not* in the afternoon. That is final. Good day."

The purser jumped up. "Gentlemen, please!" he said hastily. "Wait only one minute. I will ask again."

He hurried off and hurried back. "That is correct," he purred. "That is just what the captain insists upon—it is his order that the exchange take place in the morning!"

The two Americans managed not to laugh. Did the Japanese want to "save face"? It didn't matter. The Americans had won their point.

They seized the new passenger lists, which the typists had now completed. They worked over them all that night. As name after name was compared with those on the lists cabled from the Orient, the divergence became more and more apparent. Order came slowly out of chaos. They could begin to perceive which name applied to a woman, which name applied to a man, which names were those of husband and wife, and which were the names of children. But at daylight, the apportionment of

cabins still remained to be done, and the exchange must begin at eight.

At seven, black laborers trooped in through the dockyard gates and, marshaled by a black man thumping a savage rhythmic beat, began pushing into place the freight cars which were to serve as a barrier between Americans and Japanese when they passed from one ship to another. They chanted as they worked. A thousand Portuguese policemen, some in uniform, some in plain clothes, quietly took their stations along the lines marked out from ship to ship. The passengers, lining the ships' rails, looked down upon the scene, eager to start down the gangways. Each ship had been partitioned, by locking communicating passages, so that Japanese and Americans would never meet. All was ready.

The last car was rolled into place, and the black men marched away. MacGowan, Nicol and Kuhne looked at their watches. It was just eight o'clock.

"Go ahead!" they said.

First to leave the Asama Maru was Ambassador Grew, tall and erect, his heart heavy with the bitter thought that all his years of effort in Tokyo to dissuade Japan from war had been in vain. First to come from the Gripsholm was Admiral Nomura, who, in Washington, had pretended to be seeking peace, at the very moment when the Japanese bombers were winging toward Pearl Harbor.

The others followed. Six hundred men and women formed the long line that came down the gangplanks of the Conte Verde and walked slowly toward the Gripsholm. Porters had been sent on board the ships to transfer the heavy baggage, but almost every man and woman in the line carried bundles of personal belongings. One couple tenderly carried their week-old baby, born on board the Asama Maru.

Those who needed medical attention came under the efficient care of Dr. Kenny, who had come with the ship from New York.

His delight at finding Captain Kuhne in Lourenço Marques was natural—he had been medical officer of the *Excambion*, one of the American Export's finest ships, when Kuhne was her skipper.

When the *Conte Verde* was emptied of Americans and their places taken by six hundred Japanese from the *Gripsholm*—it had taken only an hour and a half—the exodus of the nine hundred Americans from the *Asama Maru* began.

After it was all over, they estimated that during these four hours these three thousand persons had crossed from one ship to another. On an average, one person in five seconds . . .

"You *told* us it could be done in that time," said the Portuguese officials, in utter amazement, "but we couldn't believe you. Who *would* have believed it?"

"Well, we didn't have any precedent," said MacGowan meekly, "and that's a fact. But we figured it that way."

All the fifteen hundred Americans had been mustered on board the *Gripsholm* by noon. Not the slightest disorder had attended the movement.

An unconscious tribute to the care and foresight with which every detail had been worked out in advance was afterwards paid by Max Hill, who had been the Tokyo correspondent of the Associated Press. He had been held for eighteen months in a Japanese cell, and was one of the Americans on the *Asama Maru*.

"The actual exchange of passengers was a simple thing," he wrote, in his book, "*Exchange Ship*," the story of the homeward voyage. "We had thought it would be complicated . . . Instead, the passengers merely walked down the gangplank of one ship and up another . . ."

It was all so "simple" only because of the planning that had gone into it!

"Most of the Americans and the Japanese didn't see each other," Mr. Hill added. "We passed on opposite sides of the

flatcars the Negroes had laboriously pushed into place on the tracks."

No one guessed that it had been *planned* in just that way. Nor did they know that their first meal on board the Gripsholm was already waiting for them. The commissary officer who had been brought by the Gripsholm was Hodvedt. He had been chief steward under Captain Kuhne, on the Excambion, and he knew what Americans like.

"No meal will ever taste better than the cold buffet lunch served to us at noon on the Gripsholm," wrote Max Hill. For the past month, those fifteen hundred men and women had been longing for this moment. For months before, they had known only the meagre and often nauseating scraps doled out to them in prison cells or internment camps. "We wouldn't have been hard to please," wrote the Associated Press man, "but the stewards spruced themselves up in starched white coats and put on a parade. There were big plates of white bread, soft and tasty, not gray and tough; bowls heaped with fresh butter; tender and rare roast beef; chunks of cheese and bottles of beer, and ham from pigs that hadn't been fattened on fish . . . and mounds of potato salad, glistening with oil and mayonnaise."

As the white-coated stewards pushed open the swinging doors of the big dining saloon, and the assembled fifteen hundred beheld those heaped plates and trays, they rose from their chairs as one man, and the cheer that went up echoed over the harbor.

That meal was only the curtain-raiser for the meals that Hodvedt continued to provide, from there on, until the Statue of Liberty came into sight, thirty days later.

But the three ships were to be held at the dock for four days more, while they were being readied for the sea. During the first three of those days, MacGowan, Nicol, and Kuhne were working tirelessly with the re-shuffling of the cabin assignments on the Gripsholm. Other people might sleep; they never had a chance.

Those of the passengers who had money to spend wandered

away from the ship and explored the shops along the Avenida da Republica or the colorful waterfront. But they didn't find much to buy. The Japanese had reached Lourenço Marques two days ahead of them, and had bought up everything in sight. They had bought canned foods, preserved meats, sausages, and even sewing machines and bicycles, to take home with them to a country where such things were no longer obtainable. Some said they spent a million dollars in Lourenço Marques. And still the shopkeepers didn't like them.

Some of the refugees came ashore with no clothing except what they wore on their backs. Their homes had been looted before they left Japan. A committee of women in Lourenço Marques, headed by Mrs. Preston, wife of the American consul, had foreseen just this emergency. They had sent to Cape Town, to which clothing had been sent by the Bundles for Britain committees in the United States, and distributed the clothing they got from this source.

On the morning of the twenty-sixth of July, the two ships for Japan were ready for departure. The Asama Maru went out first, followed by the Conte Verde, their decks crowded with the Japanese, and swung eastward for Singapore. The Americans watching from the deck of the Gripsholm heard their taunting cheers come drifting back across the water, and then they were gone.

During the night of the twenty-seventh, the Gripsholm pulled out into midstream and anchored there, to await a favorable tide. MacGowan, Nicol and Kuhne went back to their hotel and worked all night to complete the reports which they must send with her. At noon next day they went out to the ship in a harbor launch, delivered the reports, and came back. Their job was finished.

More dead than alive, they dragged themselves to the dock-yard gates and the taxi which they had chartered. They climbed in wearily.

"Pete the Greek's," they ordered the black driver.

Pete the Greek served good steak and onions in his shack of a restaurant on the opposite side of the bay, overlooking the harbor. They hadn't had time to go there since the first week they got to Lourenço Marques. They hadn't had time, until now, for a decent meal.

From a table by the window at Pete the Greek's they watched the big white ship rounding the point and setting her course to sea. They got to their feet.

"Thumbs up," said Nicol, solemnly.

They watched her out of sight, thinking of those she was carrying, and thinking of their own families, ten thousand miles away.

At four o'clock of the morning of the twenty-fifth of August the Gripsholm would be reaching Sandy Hook. In that early morning darkness, those men and women and children would be crowded along the ship's rail eagerly straining their eyes to catch the glimmer of the shore lights ahead—the lights of America.

And the lights would be there. To them, they would no longer be a dream.

Pete the Greek hovered solicitously by the table where the three men sat. "Evra theeng ees okay, gentlemens?" he asked.

"Everything is okay," they assured him.

"I hope they give me a ship to take out, as soon as I get back," said Captain Kuhne, chuckling. "If they keep me hanging around on shore much longer, like you fellows, I'll forget how to do an honest day's work."

VII

THE UNDEFEATED

A SEAMAN is no more qualified to look into the future than a landsman. No man who signed on in March of 1942, as a member of the crew of the Exford, could have foretold that January of 1943 would be over before the Exford's voyage was ended. Many a man, had he guessed that the voyage would last nearly eleven months, might have refused to join the ship. Or, even if the length of her voyage did not discourage him, he might well have refused to sign with her had he been able to foresee even a fraction of the dangers which were to attend that voyage. It is not possible for a ship or a man to encounter such dangers and still live. But, since man cannot see into the future, the officers and crew of the Exford calmly signed their names to the ship's articles and went with her into the unknown.

A ship, of course, has no intelligence of her own. The Exford could not have known what was before her. Sinkings of cargo ships in the north Atlantic had begun in January. When the Exford went out of Delaware Bay on the tenth of April, carrying a cargo of lend-lease munitions topped off with nearly three hundred tons of TNT, for Russia, these sinkings had been going on for more than two months.

She had left Cape May behind her and, heading for New York along the Jersey coast, was about opposite Seagirt, at half-past one in the morning of the eleventh of April. Suddenly, there was the enemy submarine. It seemed scarcely a hundred yards

away. The Exford was wholly unarmed. She turned and charged straight for the sub. The submarine did not wait to fire a single shot. It crash-dived. The Exford swept over the spot where it had been, and went on her way.

Her master, Captain Roy Ulrich, reported the incident when they reached New York. From New York, the Exford crossed the Atlantic in a convoy of several score vessels, most of which had cargoes for England. The Exford went on to Iceland with a dozen others, and remained there for a full month while waiting for other ships with cargoes for Russia. On the twenty-seventh of June she sailed for Archangel, in a large convoy.

Two days later, the convoy ran into fields of drifting ice. At half-past two in the morning of the twenty-ninth of June, moving through heavy fog, the Exford struck an unseen ice-floe. The floe was a hundred feet in width and fifteen feet thick. It smashed in the vessel's stem and tore an enormous hole in the forepeak. Although it was possible that the vessel could stay afloat, she could no longer keep up with the convoy. The escort command ordered her to return to Iceland. Captain Ulrich managed to get his ship turned around, but soon encountered even heavier ice. It was impossible to proceed under power, for it was evident that to do so would endanger the forward bulkhead, which alone was keeping the ship afloat. The captain ordered the engines slowed almost to a standstill; and for five hours the ship drifted through the ice field, until at last she had cleared it.

Eleven weeks had gone by since the Exford first put to sea on this voyage. In that time, she had been at sea less than four weeks. Seven weeks had been lost in different harbors while waiting for convoys to form. In her twenty-four days at sea no attack by the enemy had come near her. But the danger of attack had never been absent for a single hour. The men's nerves had been tightening, tightening, day after day.

Now, added to the continuing danger of torpedo attack, was the danger from the gaping hole in the Exford's bows. If heavy

weather should come suddenly upon them, battering the hideously wounded ship, it was hardly possible that she could escape foundering. No gale rose; for this, they thanked their luck. But, even in such weather as they had, the likelihood of being attacked by an enemy submarine was continually present. They were alone, unarmed, and unable to escape by speed. In the condition of the ship, it would have been impossible to maneuver her speedily, if a torpedo had been sighted rushing toward her. There was nothing for her to do but plod doggedly onward through the ice and fog, praying that she might escape attack. In thirty-six hours she came to her destination in Iceland. But those thirty-six hours held mental torture sharpened by the suspense slowly heaped up by all the weeks that had gone before.

The logbook entry said briefly: "*Vessel struck ice and forepeak stove in. Returned, as ordered by escort.*"

The Exford limped into the harbor on the evening of the last day in June. It was two months before the repairs to her bow were completed. During those sixty days her crew, like the crews of all the other vessels entering that harbor, were never once allowed to go ashore. These were not the regulations of the ship captains, but of the port authorities. Whether this was because of a fear that seamen of different nationalities might indulge in fist-fights if allowed to mingle ashore, or for fear that fifth columnists might gather information to be passed on to the enemy, the men never knew. They knew only that they could never leave the ship in which, as was the case of the Exford's men, they had already been cooped for three months. The Fourth of July fell in the week of the Exford's arrival. The crews of some of the American ships petitioned for leave to go ashore and play a ball game, to celebrate the day. The request was refused.

The Exford lay at her anchorage in the deep fjord for several weeks, awaiting the arrival of an empty ship which was to take out her cargo. The men looked longingly at the steep cliffs, only a quarter of a mile away. There was little to do in their hours

off duty. Even the daily boat drills were a welcome distraction. They read through the little collection of books in the messroom, exchanged them for those of another ship. They played cards. They fished over the rail. But they couldn't go ashore. One of the crew fell ill with a fever and was taken ashore for treatment. They lined the rail and watched enviously as the launch took him away. They seriously debated the possibilities of making themselves equally sick. One man, in desperation, swam ashore. He was brought back.

The repair ship had long been waiting, but since no dry dock was available, it was plain that the Exford must be beached, before work upon her could begin. Another ship, whose cargo had been discharged, came alongside of her, and the cargo in the Exford's forward hold was lifted out and placed on board the other. At a high tide, the Exford was then beached, and the repair crew fell to work. Within a month, they performed the miracle. The Exford's broken stem, a massive column of steel, was taken out bodily, repaired, straightened, and put back in place. All the crushed bow plates were replaced and welded together anew. When all this had been done, and tugs were ordered out to pull the Exford off the beach again, she coquettishly refused to accept any of their help. The tugs pulled and puffed and panted, but all in vain. They couldn't budge her. They went away in a huff.

The Navy salvage officer humored her. He ordered her lightened by taking out nine hundred tons of fuel oil.

"Why certainly!" snorted the cantankerous old lady, who had once tried to ram a submarine. "That's all I want!"

And she slid off the beach into deep water without further assistance from anybody.

Captain Ulrich solemnly informed the port naval commander that she was afloat. "Well, God bless my soul!" ejaculated that worthy. "Has a mind of her own, hasn't she?"

They restored the cargo that had been taken out of her, re-

fueled her from a Navy tanker, and took on board two hundred and fifty tons of provisions which she was to carry to Archangel and deliver to the survivors of American vessels who had been taken to Russian ports after their ships had been sunk. While this was being done, they armed her—at last—with a four-inch gun, Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns, and 30-calibre machine-guns. The Exford could bite back, now. There wasn't a doubt but that she would get that cargo through to Archangel.

On the third of September she was ready for sea. On the seventh of September, in a convoy of eight ships, she sailed. Her crew numbered thirty-seven men; in her gun crew were eleven more. Before those forty-eight men—and all the others—could reach Archangel they must walk hand and hand with Death.

As Iceland faded out of sight, astern, they were joined by ships which had come up from England, similarly bound for Archangel. The cargo-ships were shepherded by a large escort of naval vessels. The commodore of the convoy was Rear Admiral E. C. Budd-Wheatham, R.N. The commander of the escorting forces was Rear Admiral R. L. Burnett, R.N., flying his flag on a cruiser which was commanded by Captain L. A. P. MacIntyre, R.N.

They moved together, these scores of ships, toward Death.

Courage is not always given a name, but this movement was given a name, in code.

Any man in the convoy had need of courage. Any man who survived what lay ahead might say, in years to come, "I was in that convoy." He need say nothing more.

They had not long to wait, before probability of attack became certainty. On the ninth of September, only forty-eight hours after leaving Iceland, they sighted an enemy scouting plane. It noted the size of the flotilla, turned, and raced back toward Norway, to give the news. On that same day, enemy submarines were detected on the fringe of the convoy, and one of them, it was thought, was damaged. But there was scant com-

fort to be taken from that fact, if fact it was. The one thought in each man's mind was that the plane had sighted them, and the plane had escaped to carry to the enemy the news of their location. Attack by plane was now inevitable.

That the attack did not come instantly added excruciatingly to the tension. It did not come for three days. Through every hour of three days and three nights the tension mounted, until it seemed that a man could no longer endure it. They ploughed steadily on. Their eyes grew red with watching the taunting sky and the sneering sea. A man wanted to scream, "Come on, damn you, come on!" But nothing answered his agonized pleading. Sea and sky, empty, continued to mock him.

On the fourth day enemy aircraft again scouted over them, and again departed. Enemy submarines were also gathering for the kill. The convoy's escorting warships, racing to and fro, scattered them again and again. But each time they crept back, like waiting wolves.

On the morning of the fifth day, the thirteenth of September, the enemy launched his attack. Archangel was still seven days away. The enemy intended to attack, if need be, on each one of those seven days. . . .

The submarines struck first, that morning. Their torpedoes got home to an American freighter and a Russian ship.

Next, far overhead, sounded the drone of bombing planes. There were six of them. From that high level, out of range of gunfire, they dropped their bombs hastily and without damage to any ship, then disappeared in the clouds.

Early in the afternoon, the first terrific blow was delivered. The lookouts sighted what seemed to be a black line drawn across the clouds to the southward, a line which came rapidly nearer. As it came nearer, it appeared to be a line of black dots, evenly spaced. The dots were torpedo bombers, flying abreast, and in close formation. Men counted them. Ten . . . twenty . . . thirty . . . forty . . . and then they were within range

and the ear-splitting racket of the ack-ack fire from the ships had begun.

The British fighter planes from the aircraft carrier were already taking off. Up and up they went, then dived toward the line of advancing enemy planes, regardless of the fire from their own ships. They got some, the fire from the ships got others. Five of the enemy bombers pitched headlong into the sea, and others were certainly damaged. But still others broke through the protecting curtain of fire and began their screaming dives toward the cargo ships. In less than three minutes they were gone, and behind them they left some sinking ships. One vessel, heavily loaded with TNT, blew up, leaving no visible wreckage. The minesweeper picked up survivors from the others.

The convoy went on.

An hour later, nine torpedo bombers attacked. This time, the British planes from the carrier were able to reach them before they got near the convoy. Two of them were shot down, the others dropped their aerial torpedoes at long range, uselessly, and fled. At dusk, the final attack of the day was attempted, this time by twelve bombers. Again the Royal Navy planes and the gunfire from the ships shattered the attack. Six of the enemy planes were sent down in flames, the rest turned and escaped.

The next morning, at dawn, the enemy attacked with its U-boats. One ship was sunk by their torpedoes. Several of the submarines were attacked with depth charges from the destroyers, and in one case air bubbles and the wreckage of wooden gratings came to the surface.

When they had shaken off the U-boat pack, there was a breathing space of several hours, but early in the afternoon the planes came over again. This time there were twenty-two of them, all torpedo bombers. The Germans had clearly been exasperated by the work of the British planes from the carrier, in keeping them from their prey, and they concentrated this attack upon the carrier. Their bombs fell all around her, but she was

not hit. They went away. Shortly thereafter, a high-level bombing attack was made by twelve German planes, which circled the fleet for an hour and more, all their bombs falling harmlessly. As soon as they were gone, an attack by twenty-five bombing planes swept down upon the convoy. Another ship carrying a cargo of high explosives was hit and blew up. But again the planes from the carrier and the unremitting gunfire from all the ships saved the convoy from destruction. Rear Admiral Burnett, watching the action from the bridge, marveled at the reckless gallantry of the Navy flyers, who, in their determination to get in among the enemy planes, utterly disregarded the solid curtain of gunfire from the ships. When they had shot down or driven away the bombing planes, another high-level bombing attack followed, but caused no damage. It was the fifth attack that day. More than twenty enemy planes had been shot down. The convoy drew breath, but no one slept.

At the German air-bases in Norway, from which these attacks had been launched, that night must have been filled with bitterness for the pilots who had come back to report that the convoy, though it had sustained very heavy loss, was still on its way to Russia. The German command, furious at this incredible defiance to its planes, ordered an "all-out" attack for the next day. Every ship in the convoy must be sent to the bottom. These British and Americans must be taught their lesson.

That next day, the fifteenth of September, will never be forgotten by the men of the fleet. On the convoy's escorting warships there were officers who had served in the Mediterranean and had seen the fearful attacks launched from the skies upon convoys bound for Malta. What they saw that day, they said, was much worse. Two days before, a correspondent on board a cruiser had asserted that the attack made that day, by fifty planes, was the largest concentration of planes ever launched against a single convoy. But he had yet to see this day's attack.

On the fifteenth of September between sixty and seventy Ger-

man planes, both high level and low level bombers, attacked the convoy, the attacks continuing for three hours. German submarines, too, pressed in upon the convoy, and the merchant ships were shaken again and again by the concussion of the depth charges dropped by the circling destroyers. The men in the engine rooms below could only work on, wondering if the ship had been struck by a bomb.

Of the forty-eight men on board the Exford, only one man cracked under the unending torture of the mind. He was the oldest man on board, more than fifty years old. In a lull between two of the attacks, shaking uncontrollably, he came to Captain Ulrich and pleaded to be put out of his misery. "Shoot me, captain," he begged. "I can't stand it any longer. I don't want to live, I tell you!" The captain talked him into quietness.

The bombers came again. Captain Ulrich, hurrying to the bridge, forgot his steel helmet. A heavy piece of shrapnel struck the deck beside him. He returned to his room, got his helmet, and went back to the bridge. The German pilots, desperately striving to get through the curtain of shell-fire going up from the ships, dived recklessly to the very level of the decks, skimming the water. The ships' gun-crews continued to spray their fire at them, regardless of the danger of hitting the crews of other ships. A bullet from one of the Oerlikon guns struck the rail of the Exford's upper bridge, eighteen inches from Captain Ulrich, who continued in that exposed post to direct the movements of his vessel. Their explosive bullets repeatedly struck the Exford's starboard side; after the battle, ten punctures from the shell fragments were counted in No. 3 lifeboat, and fifteen in No. 1 lifeboat. But not a man on board the Exford was hit.

At one of the Exford's 30-calibre Lewis machine-guns, the second officer of the ship, Robert Taylor, was in command. He was a Massachusetts man, forty years old, and had been second mate of the Robin Moor, when that vessel was sunk by the enemy in May of the previous year—the first American cargo

ship to fall a victim to the Germans. It was he who had commanded one of the Robin Moor's lifeboats and had taught its crew, none of whom had known how to handle an oar until then, to use the oars so well that they had kept afloat for eighteen days, until rescued by a passing vessel. Now, in a fierce exultation that he could fight back at the enemy, he blessed the gun.

The sky was full of the enemy planes, but heavy clouds made the visibility poor, and in spite of the unceasing gunfire it was difficult to determine how many of them had been hit. The plane which Taylor marked for his own was one of those that dived to the very level of the Exford's stack. It was a two-motored torpedo bomber, diving from astern. As it shot past the ship, almost at the level of the gunners' eyes, every machine-gun on the Exford turned loose at it, a fusillade of four thousand shots to the minute. Taylor saw the tracer bullets from his own gun stream directly into the pilot's cockpit, and held the gun muzzle to the target. The plane shot on.

"That pilot's dead," said Taylor hoarsely to the man beside him. "Watch!"

For a moment, as the plane went on, apparently untouched, he wondered if he had missed its pilot, after all. Then, as the bomber neared the leading ships in the convoy, it turned convulsively upon its side, a wing sliced along the surface of the sea, and suddenly it plunged beneath the waves.

"That's for the Robin Moor," said Taylor, half to himself.

At one moment, the planes were there. The next, the sky was empty. The attack was over.

That night, the escorting warships were summoned by wireless to join a convoy homebound from Russia, and to take it through the zone through which the eastbound convoy had just past. On the day following, left with no escort except six destroyers, the convoy for Archangel was attacked again, by more than twenty-five torpedo and high-level bombers. A high-

level bomb missed the Exford by only two hundred feet, shaking the vessel severely. She wasn't hurt.

Three days later, without further molestation, they arrived off the entrance to the Dvina River. Had they been able to enter the river, a few hours more would have brought them to Archangel. But darkness had fallen, a northwesterly gale had whipped up a heavy sea, snow was falling heavily, and the convoy commodore saw that it would be dangerous to attempt the entrance. The convoy was ordered to anchor.

As Captain Ulrich was swinging his ship into the wind and sea, in order to anchor, the vessel was caught in the trough of a heavy sea. She rolled deeply in it, and the gigantic wave struck upwards, lifting the No. 3 lifeboat and unhooking its forward fall. The bow of the boat dropped into the water, and was momentarily supported by it; but as the ship rolled again and the wave receded from beneath the lifeboat, the weight of the boat was too much for the one davit. It snapped, carrying the forward davit with it. There was not time to think of the lost boat. Captain Ulrich ordered both anchors put out, to save the ship herself. They held against that gale and tremendous sea, but only with the occasional working of the engines to ease the strain upon the anchor chains. The night was anxious.

When daylight came at last, the captain noted that the starboard anchor chain was slack and hastily ordered it hove taut. But as it was hove in it was seen that the chain had broken. The anchor was lost. It was imperative, he saw, to heave in the remaining anchor and shift anchorage. But, as the port chain rumbled in, and the third shackle came aboard, this chain also snapped. Wholly without anchors, now; with the gale unabated, blowing Force 8, and with forty ships anchored around them, the captain maneuvered the heavily loaded ship as a dancer guides his partner through a crowded ballroom. A nightmare dance! To brush against any other on that tossing floor would have been to jostle Death himself.

They asked, and got, permission to enter the river and escape from this waltzing among dynamite-loaded ships. A pilot, without whom the river could not be entered, was sent for. It was ten o'clock in the morning. For eight long hours, buffeted by the seas, the Exford moved here and there, just off the harbor entrance, unable to anchor, but compelled to wait until the Russian pilot arrived. The pilot did not arrive, but the enemy planes arrived. They passed high overhead, dropping their bombs, but none fell near the Exford.

At 6, the pilotboat came alongside. A heavy sea lifted the boat and flung it against the Exford's starboard bulwark, crushing the rail and damaging No. 3 life raft. As the boat's bows crashed against the rail, the pilot leaped on board the ship.

It was thus entered in the log: "6 p.m., pilot on board."

The pilot took charge of the ship, and the Exford staggered obediently through the unrelenting hammering of the seas toward the long sand bar which lay across the entrance to the river. As they approached it, they saw that two ships had already been driven aground upon the bar, still further reducing the width of the narrow channel through which they must pass. In attempting to circle around the grounded ships, the Exford herself was driven aground by the gale. Another ship, following close behind her, also grounded, but not so heavily, and was afloat again in fifteen minutes. The Exford remained aground for fifty minutes, during which the seas wrapped her almost continuously in driving spray. Their fury saved her. Each successive comber, though it meant to batter in her sides, merely lifted her another inch or two along the bar; and suddenly she slid over the bar and floated in deep water, undefeated.

The Russian lined her up with the range lights and they went on up the river. Three hours later, while making a sharp turn in the tortuous channel, her bow grounded, an hour before midnight. This time it was impossible to get her off, until, at noon the next day, an ice-breaker tug arrived and hauled her back

into the channel. At four o'clock that afternoon, the twenty-first of September, just two weeks after she had left Iceland, the Exford arrived alongside the Archangel docks and was made fast.

It had been five months and ten days since she left the Delaware capes. Gales, sea, ice, fog, torpedoes, bombs, had stood between her and her goal. Tormented she had been, tormented she was still to be.

On the very night of her arrival enemy planes raided the port. On the day following, they came again. In the month that followed, Archangel was raided ten times. The Exford discharged her cargo. She was then shifted to the lumber docks down the river and began taking on a cargo of lumber for England. The one man in her crew who had cracked under the terrors of the voyage to Archangel, but who had seemingly regained a grip upon himself, now began to brood upon the dangers of the return voyage. Invisible pursuers stalked at his heels. He turned, saw them, shrieked, and leaped into the ice-covered river. Divers risked their lives beneath the ice, but his body was never found.

By the time the Exford had taken on her cargo for England, the river had frozen completely over, and it was necessary to use icebreaker tugs to clear the channel so that she could proceed to sea. There was a wait of several days while the convoy was being assembled, but at last, on the seventeenth of November, the convoy sailed.

They kept together for three days. A driving snowstorm then set in, and many of the ships, including the Exford, lost contact with the main body. Captain Ulrich continued on the course and at the speed which had been observed, and on the following day came up with eight others of the fleet. But at midnight that night, again in a blinding snowstorm, contact with the others was again lost. On the following afternoon, a British corvette was sighted. Identifying signals were sent to it, and the corvette commander supplied the Exford's master with additional instructions as to his course. They went on together, in this strange

chance partnership—the old American freighter, belligerent as a broody hen, and the hardbitten young British welter-weight—for the next two weeks, until, by way of Iceland and Scotland, they had reached the Exford's port of destination on the west coast of England. Other ships in the storm-scattered convoy might join them for a day or two, then part company, but these two never separated. They said goodbye to each other only after the Exford had docked.

"Well, goodbye, me boy," chuckled the Exford wheezily. "Nice to have known you."

When she had discharged the lumber brought from Russia, they hauled her into drydock to look her over, sure that she would need a lot of repairing. She had lain on the beach in Iceland, while her bow was being repaired, for three weeks; she had scraped over the sandbar at the mouth of the Dvina; she had grounded in that river; and yet, when they searched for damage, there was none.

They kept her there for a month or more, then sent her off for America in a new convoy. The Atlantic showed them dirty weather from first to last—high winds, heavy seas, snowstorms, rain, sleet, and fogs, but never once did an enemy submarine come near them. Many of the ships became separated from the convoy in the foul weather and were forced to seek port alone. But they all came in. The Exford reached Sandy Hook on the afternoon of the last day of January, and was moored at her own pier the next morning. At 9:21, the mate jotted the three letters on the final page of the log:

"F W E." "Finished With Engines."

* * *

The men prepared to go ashore. In his cabin, the second mate pulled from beneath his bunk the great bearskin parka that he had purchased in Archangel for his wife. The captain, stuffing his leather briefcase with papers to go ashore, included among them the letter that had come to him in Archangel from the

Senior British Naval Officer there, and a copy of the letter he had written in reply. The letter from the Royal Navy officer had requested that the captain forward the names of officers and men on the ship who were to be recommended for meritorious work during the passage of that convoy to Russia, but limited the number of these names to six.

Captain Ulrich stared at that well remembered letter and at his own reply to it before he put them both into his portfolio. His own letter said:

From: Master, SS Exford.

To: Senior British Naval Officer,
Archangel.

Subject: Recommendations Report, as requested.

In answer to your letter requesting report of personal heroism in this convoy, I wish the following to go on record:

1. That *all* personnel aboard were calm at all times and ready for any emergency;
2. *All* Merchant Seamen *volunteered* to man guns, carry and load ammunition;
3. In my opinion and in that of most of the officers and crew, the Seamen of the U. S. Naval Armed Guard should be recommended for a raise in pay rating for their accurate fire on enemy planes, and for conserving 20-mm. ammunition. They do not claim to have shot down any plane alone, but the entire personnel aboard know that any enemy plane within range was christened with their 20-mm. fire.
4. That a signal of appreciation should be sent to the Engine-room staff of all vessels in the convoy for standing by their posts while the vessels were being bombed and continuously shaken by depth charges. We on deck can see what is happening, but when the men below hear or feel an explosion they do not know whether their own ship has been struck or not.
5. The entire crew of the SS Exford personally wish to thank the Escort for their protection, which enabled us to arrive safe in port and deliver the goods intact.

Yours very truly,

Roy A. Ulrich, Master,
SS Exford

Captain Ulrich rubbed the back of his head thoughtfully as he reread his letter. "I think that pretty well covers it," he murmured. "I don't know as I would have anything to add to that, even if I was to write it all over again."

And he went home to Brooklyn, in which city he had been born.

VIII

THE EXAMELIA'S MEN

ON THE eighth of October, 1942, Captain Andrew Tulenko, commanding the Company's veteran ship *Examelia*, which was steaming westward along the southern tip of Africa, hoped to reach Cape Town in a day or two.

The old *Examelia* was completing her sixty-seventh voyage in the service of the Company, and was homeward bound from the fourth voyage she had made to India in the preceding eighteen months. Hers had been a long and honorable record. She had been built at the Hog Island yards twenty-two years before. She had scarcely rested since.

She was proceeding warily. Enemy subs hung around the tip of the Cape, always.

Shortly after nine o'clock that night, the *Examelia's* radio operator, Anderson, caught the frenzied message sent out from another American ship, the *Swiftsure*. "Torpedoed and sinking fast," the message ran. "Abandoning ship."

The *Swiftsure* was about two hundred and fifty miles distant from the *Examelia*, and close to the coast. Captain Tulenko, noting her position as given in her dying message, saw that she was no more than twenty miles distant from the British naval base at Simonstown. If the *Swiftsure* succeeded in launching her boats, her survivors should have little difficulty in reaching shore. And, too, aid from near at hand was surely rushing toward them.

Having heard this ominous news, the *Examelia's* watchfulness was redoubled as she proceeded on her course. Would she too

fall prey to the submarine that had sunk the Swiftsure? But the night passed, the morning of the ninth of October came, and the sun sank once more without any sign of the lurking enemy.

Captain "Andy" Tulenko, who was nearing his fiftieth year, was tall and lean. His eyes were kindly, and his thin bronzed face smiled often. All his men liked him. He had served in the Navy in the first World War and from the beginning of that war to its end had seen active service on one of the American destroyers based on Queenstown. He delighted in teasing the Navy youngster, Ensign Leovy, who commanded the Examelia's gun crew, and whose father had been a captain in the Navy. "Navy isn't what it used to be in *my* time," he would say mournfully. But Leovy always saw the twinkle in the captain's eyes. Captain Tulenko, off duty, or on, was the friendliest of men. Nothing pleased him better than a game of "acey-deucey" or Chinese checkers with anyone off watch—in particular Ensign Leovy, or with Villard, his first officer, or with Mills, the Examelia's chief engineer. He and Mills, who had been shipmates for three years when Tulenko was mate of the Exermont and Mills her first assistant engineer, often sat at cards together till two in the morning. And if the skipper couldn't find anyone to play with him, he would work on crossword puzzles or cryptograms. He bought books to read, whenever he was in port, but he was a companionable man. They all thought of him, affectionately, as "Andy."

Charley Villard, the mate, was a blue-eyed, quiet, big fellow. This was Captain Tulenko's first voyage on the Examelia, but Villard had gone mate on all three of her previous voyages to India. When they left Ceylon, homeward bound, on the nineteenth of September, the Examelia was carrying a cargo of fifty-seven hundred tons—fourteen hundred tons of chrome ore, the rest in baled jute, hemp and burlap bagging. Villard, as was a mate's duty, had supervised the cargo stowing; and the stowage

papers were carefully locked in his cabin desk, along with all his personal papers. He had been born in Pernau, in the Gulf of Riga, an arm of the Baltic, forty years before. He had gone to sea at sixteen, and hadn't seen Pernau for twenty years. His brother and sister still lived in Esthonia, but he hadn't heard from them since the war began.

The *Examelia* ploughed on, hour after hour. The night darkened. Villard, who had gone off watch at eight, went to his cabin shortly before midnight. Shourds, the second assistant engineer, who had entered the Company's service as a cadet, eight years before, began his watch in the engine room at midnight. With him was "Tony" Antonio, an oiler. Mills, the chief engineer, on his way to his cabin on the starboard side of the main deck, took pains to wedge a chock of wood under each of the doors opening upon that alleyway, so that they could not be blown shut. He had heard of doors being so tightly jammed by the force of an explosion that they could not possibly be forced open. At about a quarter to four, Villard was about to go from his room to the messroom to get a cup of coffee before going on watch. He noted that the night was pitch dark, the sky overcast with broken clouds, and that the wind was light, from the west. A long westerly swell gently undulated the smooth surface of the sea.

At twelve minutes before four o'clock, one of the Navy gun crew, stationed as a lookout on the starboard gun platform at the bridge, saw a white streak flashing through the water and heading straight for the ship, amidships. He immediately shouted, "Torpedo!"

But it was already only a few yards away, and the cry came too late. Before a single order could be issued the torpedo struck the ship's starboard side and exploded as it hit the bulkhead between fire room and engine room.

At the moment of the explosion, which shook the whole ship, the blue light in Villard's cabin went out. He groped about in

the dark for his flashlight, found it, then seized the handbag containing his papers. As he did this, the general alarm for abandoning ship sounded. He ran out and to the boat deck, on the port side, where he threw his handbag into No. 2 lifeboat. Then, listening, he could hear no sound from the ship's engines except the continuous hissing of escaping steam, coming from the fire room. Looking over the side, he could see by the phosphorescent bubbles in the water that the ship was still moving. He released the iron gripe which held No. 2 lifeboat against the strongback, to secure the boat in its swung-out position. As he ran on to No. 4 boat and released its gripe, Cabanillas, the second officer, ran toward him from the starboard side, shouting that both starboard boats had been damaged by the explosion, and could not be launched.

The explosion, directly under Mills's cabin, twenty-five feet above the engine room, threw the chief engineer bodily from his bunk and hurled him through the open door—the door that he had wedged open. He landed in the alleyway, on his feet. Every light in the ship had instantly gone out. He was not dazed, but had his wits about him instantly. Diving back into his cabin, he seized an emergency lamp and placed it on the door sill, to light up the alleyway. Then, running from room to room, he saw that the first and second assistant engineers had already gone. Ensign Leovy plunged past him, racing to call his men away from the four-inch gun at the stern.

Mills ran up the ladder to the boat deck. Dark as it was, there was light enough to see that the two starboard lifeboats had been blown from their davits. No. 1 boat was hanging upright from its forward fall, the after fall having been torn away. No. 3 boat was completely shattered. Mills noted this as he ran, running toward the emergency engine-control lever on that deck, by which he could stop the engines without descending to the engine room. As he reached it, he saw that it was all over. The engines had already stopped, crumpled like an empty tomato can by the

heavy bulkhead which the torpedo had hurled in against them. The realization that Shourds and the oiler had been crushed at their posts in the engine room swept over him. He spun on his heel and ran back towards the ladder he had just climbed.

As he plunged down it, many of the crew who had run to their stations at the starboard boats were looking despairingly at the useless boats. He heard Villard shouting to all hands to come over to the portside. He ran on.

Captain Tulenko came hurrying across the deck toward the growing mass of men beside the boats and saw the mate among them.

"Where did it strike?" he shouted.

"Engine room's gone!" the mate shouted back. "Shall we lower the boats?"

"Hold it!" Tulenko cried. "Sparks says he has got no answer from any shore station yet. I'll tell him to send off another one before we lower!"

Turning, he ran towards the bridge. At his heels ran Sam Shuster, a youngster from Philadelphia, who as cadet officer was making his first deep-water voyage. Ensign Leovy, running past the wheelhouse a moment later, heard the captain shouting down the speaking-tube to the radio operator, and paused to yell a warning.

"Captain, the ship's going down fast!" he shouted, then ran on. Already the midships deck was vanishing under water. He reached the rail and jumped.

Mills, the chief engineer, convinced though he was that no one was left alive in the engine room, was running along the corridors leading toward it. As he passed his own cabin, he swept up his life-jacket, then ran on aft. But to descend into the engine room, he now saw, was impossible. No. 4 and No. 5 hatches were already under water. The torpedo had struck less than three minutes before. He ran back.

As he ran on toward No. 2 lifeboat, on the port side, forward,

he encountered Captain Tulenko, hurrying in the opposite direction.

"Where you going, Andy?" he gasped.

"Going to my room, to get my papers," said the captain, never pausing. "Be with you in a minute."

Mills ran on, toward the boats.

At the boats, Villard had been urging the men on so that all would be in readiness to lower them as soon as the captain returned. Both boats had been swung out into position for lowering; nets had been dropped between the boats and the ship's side; into each boat twenty or more men had scrambled, and one seaman was left standing at each fall, ready to lower at the word. At one of the falls of No. 4 boat stood old Wilson, the oldest man in the crew. He was sixty-four years old.

The men in the boats began shouting in alarm. "Lower away!" they begged. "She's going down fast!"

Villard glanced aft. He saw the water spouting through the clearing-ports of the after well-deck. The ship was settling fast by the stern. The well-deck was already awash. And the captain had not returned.

"Lower about six feet!" shouted Villard to the second mate, who had already taken his place in the boat. "Then hold it and wait for further orders!"

He ran on toward No. 2 boat, already full of men. At its forward fall, there was no one. The seaman assigned to that post had been hurled against a bulkhead on the after well-deck when the torpedo exploded and had barely been able to crawl forward to the boat, into which he had been lifted. Villard seized the falls himself. At the instant, the ship shuddered and began to settle lower with terrifying speed. She was going. It was impossible to wait longer for the captain.

"Lower away No. 4!" shouted Villard. And with the words he began to lower No. 2 boat as well. The 'midships deck was already awash.

As his boat touched the water, the mate swung himself down into it by the falls, called to Carlson, an able seaman, to release the shackle, and turned to look back at the ship. A man appeared on the deck. It was old Wilson, who had lowered No. 4 boat. No. 4 boat had reached the water safely. But so swiftly was the ship sinking that the men in it had had no time to push the boat away from the ship's side. The overhanging davits clutched at the boat as the ship sank lower; they gripped its gunwale and the boat overturned, throwing all its occupants into the water. One of the engine-room crew, a man who was making his first voyage, went under and did not come up again. He was heavy-bodied and could not swim.

Old Wilson, staring down at the overturned boat, ran forward toward the other. He hesitated, then jumped.

From the boat, the mate swung a hand-rope to the old man as his head appeared above the water. Wilson grabbed at it and missed, but took a stroke that brought him alongside the boat. Villard leaned over and seized his hand in an iron grip.

At Villard's back, Carlson was still struggling desperately to release the shackle of the fall. In these few seconds the ship had sunk so swiftly, sliding under at a sharp angle, as if sliding down the ways, that its midships rail was now level with the sea. The chief engineer reached the rail at that moment and saw Carlson fighting to disengage the fall.

Villard felt the lifeboat give a sudden jerk beneath him. Wilson's hand was wrenched from his grasp. The ship had gone under and had dragged the boat, by the fall, head foremost, along with it. Water rushed over them, and every man in the boat was thrown out. Carlson was carried down with the boat, and did not come up.

Mills jumped from the ship.

The vessel sank with a rush, stern down, bows up, and vanished like a stone.

Mills came up as it went under, and struck out to get away

from its downward pull. Men were struggling all around him. Some scrambled up upon two of the life rafts which floated near. Others were clinging to bits of wreckage. Mills and two others reached a heavy balk of timber, a foot square and thirty feet in length, which had been used as a support for one of the ponderous Army tanks the ship had carried on her outward voyage. A layer of oil, six inches deep, from the Examelia's full bunkers, floated upon the sea. They thought themselves lucky beyond all men, that it had not caught fire . . .

In two¹ or three minutes the black shape of a German submarine broke surface and moved toward them in the darkness. Its searchlight was switched on. It threw a reddish light over the scene, the slow oily swells, the black figures in the water. As it came closer they read the numbers painted on its conning tower—"U 156." The men upon its deck shouted down to those in the water, as the submarine crept in among them.

"Keep away from our propellers!" they shouted.

Curses answered them.

The submarine came slowly on. When it came abreast of the wreckage to which the first mate was clinging, Villard saw that the thing was nearly four hundred feet long. On its foredeck was a four-inch gun; there was a smaller gun on the after-deck; gun crews were standing beside them. The hull was painted a light gray. A wire cutter rose above the bow. Wireless antennae extended from the bow to a short mast on the conning tower and backward to the stern. The searchlight was mounted on a tripod frame just forward of the conning tower; the dim outline of the sailor who tended it could be seen behind it. Two officers were standing beside him.

As the snout of the killer rippled toward him, Villard heard one of the two officers hailing. The searchlight swung away for a moment, then swung back so far that Villard could plainly see the officer's face, illumined in the glare. He was a young man, hardly twenty, and very blond, unmistakably German. He wore

a dark uniform, a white-topped cap, a white collar and a black tie. The brass buttons on his coat gleamed in the darkness. The officer beside him was also in uniform. Villard concluded that the submarine might have been surfaced for some time.

The young German looked down at Villard. "What iss the name of your ship?" he shouted.

Mills, clinging to his plank, swore under his breath. "Nice way to rub it in!" he muttered to the man beside him. "Why the hell don't he say 'What *was* the name of your ship?' "

But Villard and several others answered, and the submarine switched off its searchlight, and moved away. A Belgian freighter had been following behind the Examelia, only two or three miles astern, and the submarine had not forgotten her. In ten minutes more, the Belgian was overhauled. The Examelia's men, clinging to the life rafts, saw a great ball of flame momentarily light up the horizon as the explosion fired the ship's deep-tanks. Then the gleam died out, and the darkness settled again, over the empty sea.

Nearly all the Examelia's survivors had by now reached one or another of the life rafts. Mills and his two companions began swimming toward the raft toward which Villard had swum as soon as the submarine moved away. Reaching the raft, they found all three of the mates—Villard, the first mate; Cabanillas, the second; and Beck, the third—together with Ensign Leovy, the Navy guncrew officer, were about to make an attempt to right the capsized lifeboat, which could be seen drifting bottom up, at a little distance from the raft. Mills at once joined them. The five officers, together with Kavish, an engine-room fireman, and See, one of the gun crew, swam over to the boat. Having righted it, they bailed and pumped out the water, then got out the oars and rowed about in the darkness, searching for survivors. No one could be seen; but, by shouting as they rowed, they would be answered by feeble cries from all around them; and, one by one,

twelve more men were lifted into the boat. Then no more cries were heard. Captain "Andy" Tulenko had not been found . . .

Next they towed another of the life rafts to the first two rafts and fastened all three together. Beside the seven men in the boat, thirty-three men were now huddled on the three rafts. Then the seven rowed back to another lifeboat, also capsized, which they had seen while searching for survivors, and righted it. Its side was dented, and it was leaking badly.

While bailing out this second boat, the dawn broke. By the time they had towed it over to the three rafts, it was broad day; and no more survivors could be seen anywhere among the floating wreckage.

The mate called the muster. Thirty of the ship's crew answered, ten of the gun crew. Eleven men were missing. With heavy hearts they reconstructed what had happened: two men instantly killed in the engine room, at the moment of the explosion; the captain, the deck cadet, the radio operator, and two of the gun crew carried down with the ship; three of the ship's crew and one of the gun crew drowned when the lifeboats capsized.

They thought most, but in silence, of the captain—"old Andy," whom they had all loved. He had given his life for them, they well knew. Good reason why he had persisted in his effort to send off a second radio message to shore—he knew only too well that this was a region of sudden and violent gales, of storms which would wipe out all chance of getting to shore in the small boats. To make sure of help from shore was why he had stayed.

"Deal the cards!" And he had dealt them all, and a hand for himself, smiling. . . .

* * *

The men on the rafts sat shivering in their soaked clothing. Some were sick from the oil they had swallowed; some had

sprained joints; some were bruised and cut. Those who needed first-aid were given it, blankets were issued to those who were shivering uncontrollably, food and water was measured out. Rain drenched them. Showers fell intermittently. A light breeze shifted from west to southeasterly.

The mate called for a vote. "We're from thirty to forty miles from shore," he told them. "There's a good chance that somebody will come along and pick us up. Which shall it be? Stay here, and trust to luck, or get into the lifeboats and start rowing? What do *you* say, Mr. Mills?"

"Row," answered the chief engineer, bluntly.

No one else spoke. The mate nodded, well pleased. "All right, get everything from the rafts into the boats," he ordered. The food and other supplies were transferred to the boats and twenty men took their places in each.

The mate set the course north-north-east. They bent to the oars.

At about ten in the morning a plane was sighted to westward, five miles away: they sent up two parachute flares and waved distress signals, but the plane did not see them.

A little before noon, the northerly sky cleared a little and the flat top of Table Mountain, more than twenty miles away, could be distinctly seen. The men's spirits rose.

Early in the afternoon, a ship was sighted to north-westward, crossing their course. An hour later she had come up to them. Picking them up, she landed them at Port Elizabeth the next day.

Eleven days later, at Cape Town, the forty survivors of the *Examelia* were sent on board a Dutch ship which before the war had been a passenger liner. The crews of three other American vessels that had been sunk by submarines were also being sent home on the same vessel. Among them were the crew of the *Swiftsure*, torpedoed the night before the sinking of the *Examelia*, and the survivors of the *Coloradan*. The survivors of the four ships numbered 170 men, the crew of the Dutch

merchantman 130. With these three hundred men, she sailed from Cape Town.

* * *

By the second of November she had crossed the South Atlantic and was about three hundred miles off the coast of Brazil. She was directly opposite the mouth of the Amazon and about sixty miles north of the equator. The afternoon was sunny. The glare of the sun upon the water must have blinded any lookout peering in the direction of the sun.

At four eighteen in the afternoon a torpedo, coming out of the glare, unseen, struck the ship on the port side.

Villard, mate of the *Examelia*, was in his cabin on the opposite side of the ship. Mills, chief engineer of the *Examelia*, was swapping yarns with the third and fourth mates of the *Coloradan*. All four raced up to the boat deck.

The Dutch ship had six lifeboats, three on each side. On the port side, Villard saw No. 1 boat still hanging from its falls, apparently unharmed. No. 3 boat was gone. No. 5, a motor boat, to which he had been assigned, had been thrown to the promenade deck. Its stern was smashed in.

Observing that the ship now lacked two of her six boats, Villard hurried down to the after well-deck, intending to aid in launching the two life rafts there, if the need came. But, finding that two sailors had already launched them, he again ascended to the boat deck. The ship was still moving, and was swinging to the left; the starboard engine was still going ahead. The vessel had been settling in the water, but had apparently stopped sinking while the well-deck was still two feet above water.

Mills and the *Coloradan's* two officers, in the meanwhile, had gone below and were closing the portholes, thinking that if the ship listed to one side she might take in enough water to capsize her.

Regaining the boat deck, Villard found it crowded with the crew and the seamen who were, like himself, "passengers" on the ship. Word was being passed around that "an explosion had occurred in the engine room" and that the chief engineer would soon have the damage repaired. The ship's officers were keeping the crowd away from the boats.

Making his way to the starboard side of the deck, Villard observed that only a half-dozen men were standing near the aftermost of the three boats on that side. It was a small whaleboat, perhaps eighteen feet long. Two of the "passengers" were at the falls, ready to lower it. Villard offered to take the place of one of them. But they said they were sailors and could manage by themselves. Villard stood by, ready to clear the falls. From where he stood he could see the captain of the ship and others of her officers on the starboard wing of the bridge.

At four twenty-eight, just ten minutes after the first, a second torpedo struck the vessel. Like the first, it struck on the portside, but forward of the bridge, opposite No. 3 hatch.

The explosion blew the covers from the hatch, together with a dusty cloud of iron ore from the hold, mingled with the fragments of shattered ice-boxes and timbers. As the huge cloud of debris settled Villard glanced again at the bridge. No one was left there. Men had already filled the boats and were lowering them with desperate haste.

Villard waited while the two sailors at the whaleboat lowered it and slid down to it. Then he followed, sliding down the after fall. Before he could reach the boat the fall had been cast loose, and he dangled over the water. The boat was six feet away from the ship's side. He let go, dropped to the water, swam to the boat and seized its gunwale. Glancing up at the ship towering over him, he saw that her bows were already submerged, the deck which had been a dozen feet above them was now nearly level with the whaleboat, and in another moment would go under.

"Get clear of the ship!" he shouted to the men in the whaleboat to which he clung. "She'll take the boat with her!"

A torrent of sea water was already pouring over the ship's rail, pulling the boat with it. He shouted again to the men in the boat, and braced his feet against the ship's side, to keep from being crushed between boat and ship. The boat turned endwise, his feet slipped, and instantly the boat swept him against the ship's deck railing. The barest fraction of a second stood between him and death. His ribs were cracking. But the railing sank deeper into the water; and with a desperate summoning of his remaining strength he managed to pull himself beneath the boat, to emerge on the side away from the ship.

As he did so, a burst of spray rose beside him. A kingpost, weighing tons, had fallen from the ship and struck the whaleboat just as he was diving under it. When he came to the surface, men and boat had vanished.

He struck out. Two of the lifeboats were floating bottom side up. A third, the only one that had got clear of the ship without being capsized, was so jammed with men that there seemed room for not one more. But he swam toward it. Reaching it, he clung to the lifeline looping from its gunwale. He was utterly spent. He had been squeezed between the ship and the whaleboat, he had swallowed water while clawing his way under the whaleboat: he had no strength left with which to climb into the lifeboat.

But he was pulled into it. In a few minutes he had revived sufficiently to look about him. The capacity of the 30-foot lifeboat was sixty persons; seventy-two were crowded in it.

They got out the oars and pulled clear of the ship's wreckage. Villard pulled at one of the oars.

The ship had disappeared below the surface. Several men were clinging to the bottoms of the overturned boats. Others were clinging to the life rafts. Scores were floundering in the water. The Examelia's second mate, Pete Cabanillas, and her

third engineer, Hinez, had disappeared. They were never seen again.

At the moment of the second torpedo's explosion, Mills, the Examelia's engineer, and his friends from the Coloradan saw that the ship was doomed. They ran along the passageway, gained the deck and jumped overboard just as the ship went down. As they came to the surface the ship's propellers were rising just over their heads.

Then she slid under ; and the slow swells lazily rocked the scattered wreckage, the struggling bodies of two hundred men.

Mills, like Villard, glimpsed the damaged and capsized life-boats as the swells lifted him while he trod water. He was perfectly at ease. Mills, who had reached his thirty-fourth birthday less than six weeks before, was a man of prodigious physical strength and a tireless swimmer. He was not tall, but his chest was as deep as a barrel, and his one hundred and eighty-five pounds were solid bone and muscle. He shook the warm salt water from his dark head and drew a deep breath, easily, almost smiling.

An odd memory had flashed across his mind. He was eight years old, and swimming with a lot of other youngsters, no older than himself, off a beach at Cove Neck, near Oyster Bay, on Long Island. The water was warm, just as this equatorial water was. The kids paddled in it all that day. In the afternoon, his grandfather had come walking toward them across the sands and had waved to him.

"Freddy!" he had called. "Come on in, all of you, and get your clothes on! I'm going to take you somewhere!"

Freddy Mills had been born in the Bronx, and lived in the Bronx. But his grandfather was superintendent of a seashore estate at Cove Neck, an estate owned by a gentleman named Emlen Roosevelt. And Freddy had come there day after day, all that summer, to swim. He would rather swim than eat.

"Come along, you kids!" his grandfather called. "Going to show you something!"

They had got into their shirts and knickers without waiting to dry off, and the old man had led them, while they chattered excitedly, to the big house on the adjoining estate. It was Mr. Emlen Roosevelt's cousin's house, the boys knew that. Everybody in the whole world knew that. Because Mr. Emlen Roosevelt's cousin had been president of the United States. His name was Theodore Roosevelt.

Old Mr. Mills led the small boys into the house and into the big library, whose walls were hung with heads of bear and moose and lion that the ex-President had shot. Old Mr. Mills introduced the boys by name, one by one, to the Colonel, who shook hands with each one of them.

"This one," said old Mr. Mills proudly, pushing Freddy forward at the last, "is my grandson. He thinks he wants to go to sea when he grows up."

The Colonel smiled down on him. "Well, Freddy," he said, "can you swim?"

"Sure," said the boy, shyly. "I can swim."

Then the Colonel showed them all the trophies of his hunting trips through Africa and Brazil. Perhaps it was both those things that made Mills think now of that childhood afternoon, so long ago—the warm salt water, and the thought of Brazil. Brazil! Why, they were off the Brazilian coast right now! And the jungle . . .

The momentary thought vanished, as swiftly as it had come. Mills struck out, swimming strongly and easily, to a raft floating not far away.

The raft was scarcely five feet square, but four or five men were clinging to it. One was Captain Matthews, who had been skipper of the Swiftsure. Another was Mercer, the Swiftsure's chief engineer. Mills and the others began pushing the raft toward an overturned lifeboat around which many men were struggling. Bergdoff, junior second officer of the Dutch ship, was among them.

They were managing it badly. The men kept trying to right the boat and climb into it, but each time it overturned. The Dutch vessel's chief engineer and two Javanese messmen were lost as the boat overturned a second time. And still the frantic men continued to struggle into the boat before the water could be bailed from it.

"Go over there, Mills," said the Swiftsure's skipper. "See what you can do."

Mills swam over. It was no wonder, he saw, that they were having no success in freeing the boat of water. On her starboard gunwale, midway between waist and bow, a hole forty inches long and twenty inches deep had been torn out of the planking. Someone had pulled a square of canvas against the hole but no one was holding it in place. The water poured in at will.

Mills spied a youngster named Sewall, one of the gun crew of an American ship, among the floundering swimmers. He brightened at sight of him, and hailed Bergoff.

"Keep your men the hell out of this boat for a while, for God's sake, mister," he pleaded, "and let Sewall and me see what we can do. Will you do that?"

The two Americans climbed in. The Navy kid held the canvas over the hole and Mills bailed. He knew that it wouldn't do much good, but it was a starter.

Then the submarine surfaced, near the boat in which Villard sat, and came toward it. An officer on her deck hailed the single lifeboat which had remained manageable and ordered it to come alongside. The Dutch vessel's senior second officer was in charge of it. They rowed toward the submarine. When close to it, the submarine officer asked the ship's name, her tonnage, her nationality, and the reason why she was carrying so many men. Next he asked why the ship had not been abandoned as soon as the first torpedo struck.

"You had plenty of time," he said indignantly. "We gave you ten full minutes before firing the second torpedo."

He then asked if the ship's position had been sent out by wireless. When told that it had not been sent, he promised to do so. Then, going clear, the submarine submerged.

The boat in which Villard was rowing was directed by its commander to row away, to the westward. Villard protested.

"If we go back to the capsized boats, sir," he pleaded, "some of us who can swim can give a hand in righting them."

The Dutch officer agreed. But when they pulled back, the capsized boats had already been righted, and those who had climbed into them were busily bailing them out. As they passed the boat in which Mills had begun to work, the two Dutch officers hailed each other. Neither Villard nor Mills understood what was said.

They rowed on, to another boat. It had thirty-five men in it, and was towing a raft on which lay two injured men. Villard asked the Dutch officer what he intended to do.

"We will tow this boat, and the raft," he replied. "As you see, it has a hole in the bow and cannot take on any more men. The other boat will stay behind and pick up as many survivors as it can make room for. That is all we can do. We have not room for one more man."

So they hoisted sail and set their course southwest, towing the boat and the raft. During the night the two injured men on the raft stopped moaning. In the morning, two men from the lifeboat climbed upon the raft, saw that the injured men were dead, and slid their bodies into the water. Then they removed the breaker of fresh water and the food from the raft and cast it adrift.

On the fifth morning, before daylight, they sighted two ships which were bringing up the rear of a north-bound convoy. For a few minutes, they exchanged signal flashes, then the boats lost sight of the ships in the darkness. At daylight, they sighted a ship, coming toward them. It was the tanker Gulfstate, which had asked permission to leave the convoy to pick them up. The

one hundred and seven men were taken on board. Two of the Dutch ship's crew and one of the Americans died before they reached Trinidad. They were buried while the tanker engines drove her on, never pausing, beneath the burning sun and across a sea incredibly blue.

The solemn words for a seaman's burial fell gravely upon Villard's heart as he watched the bright flags flutter from the bodies plunging to the blue sea.

"Unto Almighty God we commend the souls of these our brothers departed, and we commit their bodies to the deep; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection unto eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the sea shall give up her dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in Him shall be changed, and made like unto His glorious body; according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself."

How many of his shipmates had gone since he had last seen the Examelia, as she plunged beneath the waves! And his captain, old Andy, the well-beloved . . .

But ships remained, and ships must be taken out to sea. He was not long ashore. There were guns and tanks and planes to be taken overseas. The Exford, back from Archangel, was readying to go out again when he returned.

He was Captain Villard now. Appointed master of the Exford, he took her out. Twice he had escaped the sea. A man has to face the sea.

* * *

The Dutch ship went down at half-past four on the afternoon of November second. It was about 5 o'clock when Mills, who had been in the water for half an hour, swam to the damaged lifeboat and began to study the chances of repairing it.

The boat was the regulation Dutch lifeboat, about thirty-five feet long, certified to carry sixty-three persons. In its present

condition it could not have survived even a moderate sea for a single hour.

It was a wooden boat. Mills was not a boat carpenter. But he was a ship's engineer and therefore tools were a part of him, as much as his bones and sinews were parts of him. It was no less important that he was dowered with magnificent strength and had been a swimmer since his childhood. Water terrorizes some men. He rejoiced in water, as a bull sea-lion might.

Tools were in his mind from the moment he swung himself over the gunwale, scrambled to his feet, calf-deep in water, and saw the gaping wound in the boat's side.

His eyes ran over the boat and he saw what he had hoped for—a locker, amidships. He willed that in it there would be tools . . .

"Let's get some of this water out," he said to Bergoff, the Dutch ship's junior second, "so we can get at that locker."

Bergoff and the Navy kid, Sewall, together with two or three others, set to work with buckets.

Mills wrenched the locker open. In it was a toolbox of heavy tin. He lifted it out. It was locked!

Mills glanced around. "Anybody got a sheath-knife?" he said.

One of the men held out the heavy-bladed knife to him. Mills grinned, for the first time.

"Attaboy!" he said, seizing it.

He drove the point of the blade through the tin. Again, and again, and again, while the men beside him continued to bail. Once he heard Bergoff shouting to someone nearby and another Hollander answering. He did not look up.

It was the other lifeboat, passing.

Mills went on cutting around the tin top. He hacked the box open. And there were the tools!

He inventoried them, as a dying man might count over the very promises of God. There was a small saw. There were pliers, pinchers, copper wire, a few large nails, wooden plugs, caulking

tools, oakum, some thin sheets of lead, a great quantity of small nails and copper tacks. Simple things. Unutterably beautiful to see.

Mills lowered himself over the side of the boat. "Hand me down a piece of that lead," he said. They handed it down to him. The sinking sun shone on his uplifted hand.

He shaped the soft sheet of lead over the splintered planking of the boat and tacked it firm. Under its edges he drove the oakum, and with the caulking tools he caulked each seam. Around him, still, the heads bobbed in the water, and hands stretched toward the boat.

"Keep them away," he gasped, "till we get this done."

He clambered back into the boat at last. The big hole in the boat, the hole that was a yard in length, had not yet been touched. But the worst of the smaller leaks had been stopped. Mills rested a moment and filled his lungs.

Then he told them what he wanted next. They understood, and Mills bent over the gunwale once again, this time beside the shattered planking.

Two men gripped him by the ankles, as he had told them to do. They lowered him, head downwards. In one hand he held the square of heavy canvas, in the other a hammer. His head went under water, he pushed the canvas against the bottom of the boat, he reached for the nail he had been holding between his lips, he hammered the nail home.

Then he twisted his body upwards from the waist, gulped air, and held up his hand to Bergoff for another nail.

This began before 6 o'clock. Mills continued to dive and hammer for almost two hours. . . . He had breath enough and hands enough only to hammer in one tack at a time. In those two hours he was lowered beneath the water a hundred times. . . .

He would not admit that his strength was gone when he had finished fastening the canvas over the hold. Ripping up a strip

of the wooden gratings which lay beneath the boat thwarts, he fashioned a makeshift gunwale from it and nailed it across the top of the gaping hole. Then he brought the canvas over it, tacked it down, nailed a second strip of grating above the canvas. He straightened up and surveyed his handiwork.

"Okay," he said. "That will last a while."

The sun had gone down. The sea was growing dark. They began to gather in the men who were clinging to the wreckage floating around them.

"This boat is going to snap in the middle if we crowd any more weight into it," said Mills. "We'd better make a Spanish windlass to hold it together."

They found a coil of heavy rope and stretched it over the thwarts at bow and stern, lengthwise of the boat, then placed a piece of plank between the double loop and twisted it like a tourniquet until the ropes were taut as iron bars.

"You've got a sound boat, now, mister," said Mills to the young Dutch officer. "It's all yours. Take it away!"

But there were other things still to be done. The rudder of the boat had been torn away by some missile sent flying by the explosion, and in the sternboard was a jagged hole a foot square. Mills patched the hole in the morning, fashioning an oarlock in the new patch, so that a steering-oar might be used in place of the rudder.

They floated at the scene of the ship's sinking all that night, now and then pulling still another half-drowned man into the already crowded boat. Twice during the night the submarine returned and threw its searchlight over the wretched men, no one knew why. After daybreak it did not return.

Mills took up his patching as soon as the dawn gave light enough, and worked on until mid-morning. A few more men were picked up. By half-past ten, sixty men were in the boat, and there was no longer room, even for the wounded, to lie down. It was impossible to take any more on board. It was decided at 11 o'clock to make sail and steer for land.

Bergoff, being an officer of the stricken Dutch ship, took command. Several of the sixty men were sick or injured. The rest were told off into watches. Two men were kept continually bailing. There were only five men who could handle a steering oar. These were the four officers, Bergoff, Captain Matthews, Mercer and Mills, and the Navy youngster. It was agreed that each should steer for two hours, with a man from the crews to help him, and then take his turn again, eight hours later.

They hoisted sail. The compass and much of the boat's supplies had been lost when the boat first capsized. They steered by the sun, steering southwest. Just as they started they passed close beside one of the life rafts. There was a man lying stretched upon it, but he was dead. All supplies had already been taken from the raft.

When night came, they set their course by the stars.

The boat, with the patched hole in its bows, sailed on for eight days. There was room for no one to lie down. They slept, if they slept at all, sitting up, leaning against each other. Most of them were naked. By day, the sun beat down cruelly. By night, the wind would freshen, the seas grow higher; spray would drench the men; they shivered with the chill. The Dutch officer measured out two ounces of water to each man, each morning, and two more ounces at night. The fierce sun dried all moisture from their bodies. Mills, who had weighed nearly two hundred pounds, lost six pounds of weight each day.

One of the wounded men propped up in the bottom of the boat had been one of the Swiftsure's crew. When the torpedo struck, he had been knocked down by a piece of flying steel and injured internally. On the fourth day in the open boat he became delirious. From then on, he babbled day and night. Seamen took turns in sitting beside him. Men listened sullenly. There was no way in which to help him. Unable to help him, they longed for him to die.

From the first the strain put upon the boat's damaged hull as soon as it felt the shock of wind and wave filled every man

with alarm. Each day Mills found the canvas beginning to wrench away and must renew its fastenings. Each day the blows of the waves would wrench the planking crazily, so that their seams would open, and again he would have to caulk them.

They sailed on.

On the eighth afternoon they saw the land, a distant pencil line upon the horizon. The wind was strong and it was difficult to keep the boat on its course. Mercer, the Swiftsure's engineer, was at the steering oar. Just as night shut down, the oar snapped in his hands.

It was the last oar they had.

They lowered sail. One water barrel had been emptied, and they knocked in its head, rigged the cask as a sea-anchor, and kept the boat from drifting away.

They had no lights. The night was black. Mills took the broken oar, and, with the saw, shaped the broken ends so that they could be fitted together. With an awl, he pierced the tough wood for nail holes. There were no nails left in the tool-box. Mills dug out some of the screws holding down the boat thwarts. He hammered them into rough nails. He nailed the dovetailed pieces of the oar together. He bound the mortise with the copper wire. He took slats from the boat's bilge-gratings and lashed one on each side of the oar, a splint. And now they had one oar. Mills took the pieces of another broken oar, which they had saved, and from them made a second oar. All this was done in darkness. It took hours; but it was done at last.

They began rowing.

At daybreak they could see the land close at hand. It was the eighth morning since the sinking of the ship.

They managed to get the boat through the surf pounding on the sandy beach, and carried the sick ashore. They stretched the sail as an awning above the delirious seaman, but he died that night. Before morning, one of the crew, whose lungs had filled with seawater, also died.

When they had stripped the boat of all its remaining equipment, they marched two miles along the sands until they came to a native fisherman's hut, hidden in trees. The people gave them water, fruit, cashew nuts and dates, and later brought them a woven basket full of little fish, so that each man got one.

In the afternoon they were guided to a larger village, eight miles down the beach. There they were given yams, rice, and fish, and rested two days. On the third day a plane landed beside the boat they had left on the beach, bringing with it two American doctors who gave them medicines.

Then, in canoes, they were taken up the Paranhimba River through the jungles and at last reached Maranhao. Army transport planes, each carrying twenty of the rescued men, flew them north two thousand miles. They were home again.

Mills had sent a cable to his wife, who was in Detroit, as soon as he knew when the plane would reach New York. As he stepped from the plane, she was waiting there. Mills pulled her to one side.

"Say, honey, the first thing I've got to do is to get some clothes," he whispered. "These are all I've had to wear since we got sunk!"

His wife looked doubtful. "Well, we can try," she said. "But this is a holiday, you know. The stores might be closed."

"Holiday?" said Mills. "What holiday?"

"It's Thanksgiving Day," said Mrs. Mills. And for some reason she could say nothing more, but hid her face against his wrinkled coat.

* * *

Mills, who had been chief engineer of the *Examelia*, was not long ashore. A Liberty ship was loaded at the Company's piers. He sailed as her chief engineer.

But before he left, he dropped in to say Hello to old Bob Smith, who was a big man now in the Local. Bob Smith had been a

Navy man in the first World War. After that war, he joined the Company as chief engineer of the Excelsior. Mills's first job with the Company, when he was only twenty-one, had been on the Excelsior. Bob Smith had taught him everything he knew. He had made fourteen or fifteen voyages with old Bob, in the Excelsior.

"I hear you did pretty well," said old Bob gruffly. "But who ever taught you how to patch up a boat while you stood on your head, under water? Not *me*! I wouldn't know how!"

"Neither did I," said Mills. "It was kinda like a nightmare. But I had to try *something*, didn't I, chief?"

He hesitated. "Lucky we found the tools," he added.

IX

A PAIR OF ACES

THE PERSONALITY of Captain Samuel Groves was made striking by his gentleness. He was not a tall man. He was extremely quiet in his manner. He never "put himself forward" in any conversation. His voice was low, his bearing almost shy. But all who met him were instantly impressed by his dignity. Utterly without ostentation, he compelled confidence.

Captain Groves had served the Company for nearly twenty years—almost since its very beginnings. He was regarded as without a superior as a shipmaster. When war began, he was immediately called into service in the Navy, in which he had been a reserve officer for many years. Taking him, the Navy also took his ship. They belonged together.

Late in October, 1942, eleven months after the war's beginning, Captain Groves (Lieutenant-Commander, USNR) stood on the bridge of a ship bound out to set from an unnamed seaport on the east coast of the United States. He was one among a thousand other officers, all engaged upon the same enterprise; a task of immense danger, immense importance, immense secrecy. It never crossed his mind that in one particular he was probably unique among all these naval officers, young or old; for he was too preoccupied with his duties to give even a passing thought to any matter of mere personal sentiment.

Around him, the entire horizon was filled with ships, all moving eastward together, a flotilla so enormous that it was incredible. They could not be counted. Ten . . . fifty . . . a hun-

dred . . . two hundred . . . four hundred—there was no end to the counting! Among them all—gray battleships, gray cruisers, gray aircraft-carriers, gray destroyers, gray merchantmen converted to troop transports—there were two ships which he knew so intimately that his very soul seemed a part of them.

One was the Exeter. He had once commanded the Exeter. The other was the Excalibur, the ship on which he was then standing. He had once commanded the Excalibur.

In all that enormous fleet around him, moving in majesty, what other two merchant ships had had one master, and saw that one master with them today?

It was not by accident that Captain Groves was included among the officers now on the bridge of the Excalibur. That choice was logical. But it was accident, the sort of meaningless joke that Fate likes to scribble slyly upon the margin of the neatly written plans of men, that the Exeter should be there as well, to remind him of other years.

"Look your fill, captain, at these two ships, while you can," said Fate, tauntingly. But her lips made no sound. No one heard. "Take your last look at them. I have already set the date for their death."

Eleven years before, the Company had built and launched four new ships. They were sister ships, these four. They were exactly alike in size and equipment. Each one cost more than two million dollars. The four were christened the Excambion, the Exochorda, the Exeter and the Excalibur. Each one was four hundred and fifty feet in length, each one was built to carry a cargo of nearly six thousand tons. Each was driven by steam turbines that, giving eight thousand horsepower, gave the ship a speed of sixteen and a half knots. Each had fifty-four staterooms, with accommodations for more than a hundred passengers. Larger, infinitely more luxurious, and far swifter than the fleet of twenty freighters already operated by the Company, they were proudly nicknamed "The Four Aces."

The glistening new Exeter, immediately upon being placed in commission, had been entrusted to the command of Captain Groves. In the four years that followed he took her on a score of voyages across the Atlantic and around the length and breadth of the Mediterranean. He was then placed in command of her sister ship, the Excalibur, and in the next five years added forty more voyages to the Mediterranean. Then came two years in which the Excalibur, still under his command, made a score of voyages to Lisbon. In the eleven years since their launchings, he had taken these two ships through nearly a million miles of sea roads. Eleven years, four thousand days, a hundred thousand hours of his life had been lived upon them. He knew them, better than a man knows his own innermost thoughts. They were a part of him.

When the Excalibur had completed her eighty-second voyage in the service of the Company, America had been at war for less than a month. That final voyage under the management of the Company did not take her across the ocean. The Excalibur had been taken over by the Navy. It was Captain Groves's final duty as her master to deliver her to the naval yard where she was to be converted into a Navy transport. The shipyard hammers began to ring upon her on the eighth of January, 1942.

In mid-April, the job was completed. The Navy gave her a new name—the Joseph Hewes. As a Navy ship, a Navy officer must now command her. Captain Robert Smith, USN, was given her command. But Captain Groves—now Lieutenant-Commander Groves—was assigned to her as her navigating officer. Three officers who had served with him on the Excalibur—Shriner, the chief engineer; Young, who had been first assistant engineer; and Benson, who had been second mate—had all been commissioned as Navy reserve officers and remained with the ship as well.

The Exeter was similarly refitted. She was renamed the

Edward Rutledge. The names bestowed upon the two ships were those of patriot leaders of the American Revolution.

Secrecy had enshrouded every movement of the Army and Navy, every plan set afoot, from the first day of the war's declaration. This secrecy continued. Greatest of all these plans, staggering in its immensity, was the plan for the invasion of North Africa. It involved the assembling of many hundreds of vessels, the preparation of immense stores of military equipment, the training of an enormous body of troops. It was above all vital that no faintest hint of information concerning this gigantic enterprise be divulged to the enemy. And although the vast work of preparation occupied an entire year, it remained a miraculously guarded secret.

From mid-April to mid-October the *Excalibur* remained in Chesapeake Bay, and was used in the training of successive battalions of troops for an "imaginary" invasion, in beach landing-boats. With from six to ten other ships at a time, she was stationed off a remote island in the bay; and night landings on its beaches were practiced over and over through all these six months.

Around the middle of October, the *Excalibur* was ordered to the port from which the fleet was to depart. At its docks, she loaded her holds and decks with guns and tanks, trucks, jeeps, ammunition, and landing-barges. Her crew numbered four hundred and twelve officers and men. At the last moment, eleven hundred infantrymen, commanded by Major Cloud, came on board. Shortly, the whole fleet got out to sea.

The days spent in crossing the Atlantic were tense but uneventful. The chaplains of the fleet could well give thanks to God, that in all this voyage not one enemy submarine cruised near enough to discover the armada, then to escape to summon others.

The hour fixed, far in advance, for the beginning of the landings upon the African coast was the hour just before daylight of

the morning of the eighth of November. There was no deviation from this time-table. On the seventh of November, the fleet had drawn close to the African coast. Vice-Admiral Henry Kent Hewitt, who had been directing the American naval operations from the beginning, here signalled the great convoy to divide itself into three sections. One section was sent to make a landing at Mehdia, fifty or sixty miles to the south of Casablanca; a second was directed to Safia, on the outskirts of Casablanca; and the third, in which the Excalibur and the Exeter were included, was sent to Fedhala, ten or twelve miles to the north of Casablanca. As darkness fell, that afternoon, all began moving toward these appointed destinations, under cover of the night; and just before midnight, exactly on schedule, the transports among which were the Excalibur and the Exeter anchored off Fedhala, six or eight miles from the beach. On board them were from fifteen to twenty thousand troops.

The work of debarkation began at once. Down the sides of the anchored transports, black shapes in the darkness, barge after barge and boat after boat was lowered and filled with men and guns and vehicles, until the dark sea was filled with hundreds of dark shapes—"a shadowy shape that bends and floats on the rising tide like a bridge of boats." At 3 in the morning the signal was given to start for shore. The first wave of boats reached the beach at 4 o'clock, two hours before daylight, exactly as had been planned. All of the several hundred soldiers on board the Excalibur, with the exception of forty men who remained on board to assist in discharging the cargo, landed with the others.

The officers and crew of the Excalibur waited in suspense. An hour passed in silence. No flares rose above the distant beach, to show that the French had discovered the incoming troops. Then, at 5 o'clock, came the sound of gunfire, and the flashes of the guns. The French resistance was stubborn. Thirteen of the Excalibur's seventeen lifeboats were damaged as the men reached the beach. Major Cloud, commanding the detachment from the

Excalibur, and nearly fifty of his men were wounded. One of the Excalibur's junior deck officers, Ensign John O'Toole, of Boston, who had gone ashore with the troops, was so badly hit by shrapnel that he lived only a few hours.

At about 10 in the morning, three French war vessels, two cruisers and a destroyer, emerged from Fedhala harbor and steamed recklessly straight for three American cruisers, the Brooklyn, the Augusta, and the Cleveland, which were lying off shore, about nine miles from the Excalibur. When they were five or six miles apart, they began firing. From the bridge of the Excalibur, Captain Groves watched the fight through his glasses. He could see the shells from the French cruisers striking the water about three thousand yards from his ship. The fight lasted for not more than fifteen minutes, then the French ships turned and ran back for the harbor. One of the French cruisers was beached, a total loss, as soon as she got inside the breakwater. Hit forward of the bridge, she had burst into flames.

When the French at last gave the order to cease opposition, the American transport vessels moved closer in towards shore, to discharge the rest of their cargo, anchoring about three miles off Fedhala, in twenty-seven fathoms. For the next three days, through Wednesday, November 11, the Excalibur continued to discharge her cargo; and during this time thirty-six soldiers who had been wounded in making the landings were brought back to her and placed in the sick-bay.

The Americans were now in complete control of Morocco; but during these three days German submarines ranging the Atlantic had been told of the American ships still lying huddled there, and some were racing toward Casablanca . . .

That night was rainy and pitchy black. Shortly before 8 o'clock Captain Groves was on the bridge of the Excalibur with Captain Smith, commander of the ship. With them was the officer of the deck, Lieutenant Benson, who, before the war, had been the Excalibur's second mate. A junior deck officer, a signalman

and two quartermasters completed the watch muster. Forty of the ship's crew were still ashore, remaining there to complete the handling of the cargo which had been discharged. They had been sent there in the four lifeboats which were the only ones remaining undamaged. The Excalibur was without boats, and there were several hundred men on board her.

At 7:55, without warning, the ship was struck by a torpedo from a submarine.

At the same instant, another torpedo passed close ahead of her bows and struck a Navy oil-tanker which was lying near by.

The Excalibur was hit forward, almost directly under the bridge, between No. 2 and No. 3 holds. The hole torn in her side by the explosion must have been very large, for she began immediately to sink, going down by the head, very fast.

Captain Smith turned to Lieutenant Benson. Realizing that all the lifeboats were gone, but that there was a sufficient number of life-rafts to carry all the men aboard, he said quietly: "Sound general quarters and clear away the rafts."

The loud wailing of the automatic horn, hoarse as a klaxon, filled the air, the death-scream of the ship. The engine room men ran to quarters and the deck crew ran toward their gun stations. But as the command to "clear away the life-rafts and abandon ship" instantly followed the shriek of the horn, carried to every corner of the ship by the loud-speaker, all on board swarmed to their proper stations. It was necessary only to clear away the lashings of the life-rafts and let them drop into the water. But as the ship's bows were already fast sinking under water, none of the rafts forward of the bridge could be used.

The thirty-six wounded men were not forgotten. By the time the rafts were in the water, the wounded had been carried from the sick-bay by a hundred willing hands and were being lowered gently to the rafts. There was no confusion. Captain Smith and Captain Groves remained on the bridge, side by side, alert to

quiet any disorder, but there was none. "No man could ask for a better crew," said Captain Groves.

In twenty minutes every man was off the ship. Only the two officers remained. Five minutes before the ship went down, Captain Smith made his way aft to search for any possible laggards. He did not return, and Captain Groves at last concluded that he need wait no longer. Forward of the bridge, the ship was already awash. Captain Groves saw no one anywhere. He was alone, with the ship he had commanded. He had known her from the day she was born; it was he who must watch her die. He had not thought that they would part like this.

Goodbye! Can you hear me, Excalibur? Goodbye!

* * *

(It's not 1942, it's some Mediterranean night that caresses her, the night of soft airs and moonlight and stars. There isn't any war. There are happy people wherever she goes—happy people in Barcelona, and in Marseilles, and in Genoa and in Naples, and in Greece. Brightly lighted, the ship goes swiftly from port to friendly port, her bows rushing through phosphorescent seas. Along every harborside the people gather to watch her coming in. "Look, there is the American ship! Is she not beautiful? See, there on her bow is her name—Excalibur!" Excalibur—wasn't that the name of a glittering sword, a magic sword, a sword lifted up above the waters by a ghostly hand? The sword vanished again. But doesn't the legend say that it will rise once more?)

* * *

Thirty-two minutes after the torpedo struck, the Excalibur went down. Just before she plunged under, Captain Groves jumped. The sea was covered with oil, and he swallowed a good deal of it. He was only fifty feet away from the ship when it

went down. He had managed to reach an empty raft and to pull himself upon it. But the ship rolled as she went under, and he saw one of her masts swinging down towards him. He dived from the raft to escape it, and was unable to reach it again. For two hours he kept his head above water by paddling with what was left of his strength. Then a boat from one of the other transports found him in the blackness and hauled him in. The ship to which it took him was the Thomas Jefferson. Several hundred men were picked up. Ten were lost.

The effects of the fuel oil which he had swallowed made Captain Groves a sick man for weeks. Nevertheless, on the following afternoon he managed to totter from his quarters on the Thomas Jefferson to her deck. A mile or so distant, the Exeter lay at anchor. He sat there, watching her. He had commanded her, in the old days. As he watched, she was hit by a torpedo. He saw the smoke, the flame, the flying debris rise above her. She sank before his eyes.

A few minutes later, another transport, the Tasker H. Bliss, was also struck by a torpedo and burst into flames. Rescue boats hurried from the other transports to pick up the survivors from the two ships. They picked up the Exeter's chief engineer, Charles Bero, who had been her chief when the Company owned her. But the torpedo's explosion had killed another of the Company's veterans, Shoop, first assistant engineer, at his post in the engine room.

While destroyers searched fiercely for the prowling submarines of the enemy the eight remaining transports were ordered to weigh anchor and seek safety at sea. As they drew out of sight of land, a red glow upon the horizon showed them where the Tasker H. Bliss was still burning. Accompanied by an escort of destroyers, they steamed westward all night, then turned and circled back, coming to anchor in Casablanca harbor at 4 the next afternoon. Here the Thomas Jefferson discharged the remainder of her stores. Two days later, with some wounded men

in her sick-bay, she sailed for home. Captain Groves came with her. They arrived at Norfolk on Thanksgiving night.

* * *

Captain Groves, still shaken from his experience, walked into his old Company's offices in New York a few days later. In the corridor there stands, glass covered, a model of the Excalibur, first of the "Four Aces." He paused beside it, stood looking at it for a moment, then went on into the vice-president's office. There was nothing he could say. There was nothing much that anyone could say.

The two men greeted each other. When they had talked a while, the vice-president got around to a subject that was on his mind.

"Captain, I know the man I want at Casablanca. He's in the Navy now, but I've put up a holler and the Navy says I can borrow him."

"Who is he?" asked Captain Groves.

"You," said the vice-president. "You're the man I want. Will you come, Sam? Or perhaps you'd rather not. Maybe you don't feel much like seeing Casablanca after—well, after what's happened."

Captain Groves got to his feet. "Feel like it?" he demanded. "Why shouldn't I feel like it? The war's still on, ain't it?"



YOU MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK

SWAN'S ISLAND lies out in the Atlantic, five miles off the coast of Maine. Swan's Island is none too big—take a good gale from southeasterly, and you'll see salt spray blowing clean across the island, and you would think you felt the island itself pitching and rolling under your feet like the deck of a schooner. If you are born on Swan's Island, you are practically born at sea.

Swan's Island is named for Colonel James Swan, who settled there in 1765. That was mighty nigh two hundred years ago, but there's not many live on the island, even now. Those that live there are great hands for fishing and clamming. There's no clam chowder like State of Maine chowder; and Swan's Island clam chowder is the best clam chowder in the whole State of Maine.

State of Maine folks are like granite. The sea has been beating against them for close on to three hundred years; but it can't wear them down.

State of Maine folks are seamen. They've got to be.

Some folks who live by the sea are superstitious. State of Maine folks are not. You don't make good clam chowder by guess and by luck. You've got to know what to put into it. You don't sail a boat by luck. You've got to know what to do with a boat against wind and sea. You don't steer a boat with a rabbit's foot. Leastways, not if you hail from Maine. You make your own luck.

There was a man and his wife on Swan's Island, once, and they had a baby boy. That was back in 1888. The boy wasn't ex-

actly born in a boat, but he came mighty close to it. Anywhere you might look, there was salt water, and the white spray shooting up over the granite boulders. The boy didn't swim by the time he was there, but he came mighty close to it. He didn't sail a boat by the time he was six, but he came mighty close to it. By the time he was ten, he could handle a skiff under sail, as good as a grown man. From then on, he practically lived in a sailboat. This boy was a seaman born.

His name was Maurice Kent. And now it was the summer of 1942, he was fifty-four years old, and he had just been appointed master of one of the American Export Lines' vessels, the *Excello*.

Kent had been one of the Company's ship's officers for the preceding sixteen years. He had been serving on big ships for nearly thirty years and it had been thirty years since he had last stood on the deck of a small sailboat. It never occurred to him that he would soon be obliged again to take charge of one.

Captain Kent took the *Excello* safely to an Eastern Mediterranean port, discharged her cargo and started back for New York late that Autumn. The outward voyage had not been without its signs that danger lurked uncomfortably close. Once at about 3 o'clock in the morning they had sighted a surfaced submarine; but apparently it did not see them, and they soon lost sight of it. They had heard distant gunfire ahead of them one afternoon, and saw smoke along the horizon; but, changing course for a time, they passed on without sighting any enemy.

Now, on their homeward voyage, they had been steaming southward for ten days without any sign of the enemy. Nothing was seen as they came down through the Mozambique Channel. They were well to the south of it now, and running southwesterly off the southeastern coast of Africa, on the morning of Friday, the thirteenth of November; they kept up their unceasing vigilance. Five men were on lookout duty—one in the crow's nest, two in each of the gun turrets to port and starboard of the bridge.

It was a fine morning. There were fresh southeasterly winds, with moderate to heavy swells from the southeast. There was a slight haze, but visibility was fair.

At 9 o'clock, Captain Kent, who had been on the bridge since 4 o'clock, left it to his third officer, Andy Horrkovich, and entered the wheelhouse to check up the ship's position with the chief mate, Lewerenz. That position was, roughly, 32 degrees and 17 minutes latitude south, 31 degrees and 50 minutes longitude east. The two officers bent over the chart. Captain Kent moved the dividers across it.

"About a hundred and thirty-five miles south of Durban," remarked the captain. "Almost abeam of Port St. John. About seventy miles off shore."

It was five minutes past nine.

The sound of the explosion, as the torpedo struck, cracked sharply. The eyes of five good men, all searching the seas, had not caught sight of the submarine that had loosed it. Captain Kent and the blond young mate stiffened.

"Sounds like a mine!" exclaimed the captain, then instantly added, "*No!* It's a torpedo!"

He jumped for the wheelhouse door. As he leaped out on deck he glanced aft. The torpedo had struck between No. 4 and No. 5 holds, on the port side, aft. The first glance showed him the wreckage of the hatches of the two holds, blown up over the boat deck. The ship was already beginning to sink, going down by the stern, but on an even keel.

Captain Kent, with that glance over his shoulder, turned and ran for the bridge. He took the twelve steps up the companion-way in three jumps. "Sound the abandon ship!" he shouted to the third mate, as he reached the bridge. "Everybody to boat stations!" As the alarm sounded, he tried to wrench open the portside door into his own quarters, thinking to rescue the ship's papers. But the explosion had jammed the door and it was impossible to open it.

Men were already tumbling up from below-decks and running to their stations by the lifeboats. There were fifty-one men on board, including those of the Navy gun crew. There were four boats, all swung out on their davits, ready for launching, as they had been since the commencement of the voyage.

As the men began to lower the boats, Captain Kent turned to see to it that all of his men were off the ship. A moment later, glancing down over the ship's rail, he saw that No. 1 boat's falls had jammed when the boat was midway down, while the boat was still fifteen feet above the water. Its crew, a dozen men, had already leaped out of it and were bobbing in the waves. Only Larsen, the chief engineer, remained in the boat, vainly struggling to clear the falls. From above, Captain Kent tried to get them clear and to hoist the boat up again, with the aid of the second officer, Petersen, and a Navy gunner, Jenkins. But the combined strength of the three could not clear the tangle. "Get into No. 4 boat!" Captain Kent shouted down to the Chief. Larsen jumped.

"Release the life-rafts!" shouted the captain to Petersen and the gunner. As they ran to obey, he looked once more around the deck, to see if any man was left. He could see no one. The Navy lieutenant, Hoffman, in command of the gun crew, was at that moment similarly searching the after quarters of the vessel, to make sure all his men were off, but the captain could not see him. The two life-rafts, their lashings cut, plunged down to the water, and Petersen and Jenkins dived after them. The three lifeboats were already away. Not four minutes had passed since the explosion. But the ship's stern was already under water, and the bridge itself only a dozen feet above the water. Taking a last look around, and seeing no one left on board, Captain Kent jumped.

The explosion of the torpedo had shattered the deep-tanks aft; and the fuel oil which they had held was already spreading over the water. Captain Kent's head came up, streaming with

the black oil. Half blinded by it, he saw a hatch cover floating near him and managed to grip it. Then he saw one of the life-rafts drifting by. He let go of the plank, reached the raft, and dragged himself upon it. There was one man already on it. The captain struggled to his knees and looked around. Two more men climbed upon the raft, with his help. Then the captain saw a fifth man swimming toward the raft. It was the lieutenant, Hoffman, black with the oil. "I'm all right!" he shouted feebly. They got the raft over to him, and hauled him on.

By this time, the raft was only thirty or forty feet from the ship's stern. No. 4 and No. 5 hatches were already beneath the surface, and the seawater was pouring into them with the rush of Niagaras, sucking the raft with them toward the ship. Unable to get out the paddles of the raft, the men picked up some floating bits of board and frantically tried, with them, to keep away from the vessel as it sank. "It won't drag us down," gasped the captain, reassuringly. "Just lie flat and hang on to the cleats. We'll be all right."

But, clinging there, he watched the ship with an apprehension which he did not voice. As the stern settled deeper, her bow kept rising fast. Higher and higher it rose, towering over them. The raft was floating over the spot where the ship's stern had been. If the nose of the ship rose still higher, until it stood perpendicular, the captain reflected grimly, its whole crushing weight might fall directly upon them.

Tall as a fifteen-story skyscraper, the whole forward half of the ship kept slowly tilting upward, looming more and more dangerously above them. To the captain, whose upturned eyes were smarting with the thick oil, the seconds ticked off like hours.

And then suddenly she went under, a slanting plunge.

As her funnel went under, the captain could look into it, so close were they.

The tip of the heavy foremast sliced past them, buried itself harmlessly, a dozen feet from their raft . . .

His ship was gone. Captain Kent drew a deep breath. He began to look around, now, for his men.

He saw the three boats that had been lowered. The nearest was two hundred yards away, the farthest was twice that distance from him. All three were drifting rapidly to leeward, carried along by the wind from the southeast, which was growing stronger. They were tossing on swells that seemed a dozen feet high, from trough to crest. As the raft was lifted with them, Captain Kent could see two men struggling in the waves. He recognized them—one was Pete Haracz, the radio operator, the other a gun-crew man. But beyond them, here and there, were a half dozen others. Risking his footing on the slippery surface of the raft, Captain Kent stood up, waved his arms, and shouted to the lifeboat nearest him. It was the mate's boat. Young Lew-erenz heard him, as the captain's voice was borne down wind, ordered the men to their oars, and the boat came toward the struggling swimmers.

At that moment, two or three hundred yards to eastward of the boats, the submarine surfaced. It moved slowly over toward the boats. One of her officers and a few men came up from below and stood looking at their victims. As they neared Petersen's lifeboat, the submarine officer beckoned to him to come closer. The captain, watching, could see Petersen sitting sullenly quiet, in no mood to obey. Then the officer motioned to one of his men. The man lifted a machine-gun and trained it on the lifeboat. There was no help for it. The men bent to their oars.

When they had come alongside the submarine, the officer shouted to them that he wanted the captain of the ship he had sunk. He did not get him.

Angrily the officer asked a few questions, speaking through the interpreter who stood beside him—whether he was German or Jap, they never knew—and the men answered as best they could. Then the submarine pulled away, still surfaced, still

moving slowly, and passed within a hundred yards of the raft to which Captain Kent was clinging.

"It's worth trying," Captain Kent muttered desperately. "I'll try it."

In the last few minutes, he had lost sight of the two men of his crew—Sparks and the gunner—whom he had seen struggling in the waves. He resolved to play his luck. And, when he had waved an arm and had caught the attention of the submarine officer, he lifted his cupped hands to his eyes, as if he were using a pair of binoculars, and turned from side to side, in a gesture of searching for men in the water.

The submarine officer understood instantly. Lifting his own binoculars, he swept the seas with them and soon caught sight of the two men. He pointed in their direction. Then he kept on his course.

"That kind o' went against my stomach, asking any help from him," said Captain Kent, grimly watching the submarine pass out of sight, "but I was going to save those two men, if there was any way of doing it." A man has to make his own luck . . .

The lifeboat commanded by the mate, young Lewerenz, pulled up alongside the raft. Captain Kent and the four others scrambled in. Then they went over and picked up the other two. One by one, all the men afloat were found, by one boat or another—all but one, a man of the Navy gun crew ; a seaman.

In the empty and tossing seas the three lifeboats drew up to each other. Captain Kent counted heads. In his boat there were nineteen men. Into the second mate's boat, Petersen's, he put eighteen. The third boat, which was No. 4, had had its stern damaged by the explosion of the torpedo ; its rudder, too, had been splintered ; and in this boat, which was commanded by Horrkovich, the third mate, Captain Kent put only thirteen men, fearing to overload her. Lying in the bottom of that boat was the first assistant engineer, Finnegan, an old man, sixty

years old, who was one of those who had jumped into the sea. He had swallowed much oil before he had been pulled into the boat; his lungs were full of oil; and he was dying.

But no one knew it, then.

When all were in their places, Captain Kent gave the course to the mates. "Nearest land is over there to the northwest," he said. "It's about seventy miles. If this wind from southeast holds up, we'll make it inside of two days. We're in luck. It's lucky we're so close to land, and lucky we've got a fair wind."

"Luck?" muttered an engine-room hand. "On Friday the Thirteenth?"

"Now, that will be all of that," said Captain Kent mildly. "We're lucky, I tell you."

The boats were the regulation lifeboats; in addition to the oars, each was equipped with a mast, lugsail and jib. The masts were stepped, the sails hoisted, and before 11 in the morning—less than two hours after the sinking of the ship—the three small boats squared away on their course for land.

In the boat were young men who, in all their years at sea, had been accustomed only to the steel strength of a towering steamship, and who had never once put foot in a small sailboat, such as these were. These youngsters, clinging to the bottom of the boat, now looked up in misery at the huge seas rushing past them and knew that no such cockleshell could last among those waves for a single hour. But Captain Kent, settling himself in the sternsheets, felt a curious warmth of youth running through his veins as he gripped the tiller and felt it tugging against his palm as a mettled horse pulls against the reins. He had not handled a sailing-craft of any kind since his last voyage on a schooner, nearly thirty years before; and suddenly those thirty years slipped away, and were gone. He was young again, and not tired; he would get these men to land!

A man had to know just how to handle a boat, running before a following wind and sea, such as these. Not for one instant

could watchfulness be relaxed. If a man did not look sharp, any moment would see the boat overtaken and overwhelmed in the rush of the sea heaping up from behind. A man's eyes, streaming with the black engine oil, would grow bloodshot. But a man couldn't close them. A man had to keep them open wide, fixed on the sea and the sail. Leastways, any Swan's Island man . . .

The wind grew slowly and steadily stronger, hour after hour. By the end of the first three hours the wind had increased considerably and the seas were working up to dangerous heights. Heavy rain squalls began, the black clouds drifting low over the tumultuous seas, darkening the whole horizon. Until now, the other two boats had been following the captain's; but in the darkness and the bursts of rain both boats became lost to sight.

By 4 o'clock, the squalls of wind were growing so heavy that Captain Kent saw that unless sail were reduced the canvas would be blown away. The little jib was lowered, gusts of spray blinding the men as they tugged it down. The lugsail was lowered, shortened, hoisted again, men working with frantic haste, while the boat rose and sickeningly dropped, lurched and rolled. Only Captain Kent knew how desperate the chances were; and by some miracle of seamanship he kept the staggering boat from being overwhelmed. The wisp of sail once again hoisted, the boat answered more quickly to her helm. But the strain of the sheetrope, clenched in the captain's hand, which he had endured for all these hours, grew unbearable, all the solid weight of the howling wind jerking upon arm and shoulder. He managed to take a turn of the rope over a cleat and passed the end of the rope to the man beside him.

"Now, when I tell you to slack off, you slack off," he gasped. "And when I tell you to take in, you take in."

He breathed a little easier, then. "We're getting along all right," he observed cheerfully, forcing his lips into a grin. The men, huddled in the bottom of the boat, drenched to the

bone with the rain and salt spray, looked up at him in silence. This was the sea—the sea whose pitiless fury they had never known before. It was stronger than they, they could not have lasted against its rage. But they could see that he, the Old Man, was not afraid. He was smiling.

“We’re getting along all right,” he repeated, for all to hear. It wouldn’t do to let them think otherwise.

And it was true, as well. The boat had been jumping along, before that following wind. She had been making five knots. Since morning, they had made thirty miles. Even though they were moving more slowly now, with reduced sail, they were still “doing all right.”

But it was getting darker now, too dark for a man to see how to steer. Captain Kent made his decision quickly, as a man must. He must heave the boat to, turn her nose to face the wind and the endlessly running seas, and keep her facing them through the night, till light came. He told the men to get out the sea-anchor from its locker. This was a great cone of heavy canvas, its larger end held open by a heavy ring, and with a plug in its smaller end. In the water, it would fill and act as a drag, keeping the boat’s bows to the oncoming waves.

They put it over, just before dark, and for a little while it kept the boat as he wanted it. Then the plug in the end carried away, and the thing drifted uselessly. The boat began to fall away, broadside to the heavy seas from the southeast. Just after dark, with spray and heavy water coming over her gunwale, she began to fill. A man’s luck runs out, sometimes.

But not Kent’s. There was a thing to be done.

The side-curtains, wide strips of heavy canvas, had long been rigged along the gunwales of the boat, to keep the spray from coming in. “Take the tiller, Ernie!” he yelled to the mate, and leaped at those curtains. With two of the Navy gun crew to help him, the mate wrestled with the heavy helm. The captain tore at the curtains.

When there are only two or three minutes of luck, between nineteen men living and nineteen men drowned, a man has to know what to do, and do it quick. The daylight had died from the sea, but a Swan's Island man can see with his finger-tips . . . The two curtains flew out of their lashings, flew together with fresh lashings, and were weighted and stretched out along one edge by the heavy iron shanks, the boat-gripes, that flew into the captain's fingers, merely because he willed them to . . . To do this, he had worked his way up the length of the boat in the darkness, trying not to step on the men rolling around in the water that was already surging back and forth, half knee deep, in the bottom of the boat. A man has to know where things are, in the dark.

Swiftly he lashed a bridle to the corners of the makeshift anchor, knotted it to a stout coil of rope, and tossed the contraption over the bow. It pulled like a floating wall. He paid out the line, to twenty-five fathoms' scope. The boat swung around, to the pull of it. Her head came up into the wind. A man has to make his own luck, sometimes . . .

Kent picked his way back, stepping between the huddled and hopeless men, putting a hand down now and then to steady himself on a shoulder.

"She'll ride easier now, boys," he said confidently. "Get up, bail some of this water out of her, there'll be another day here, tomorrow!"

He took the tiller again. There was food in the lockers—biscuits, pemmican, and water—and he told the mate to see to it that the men got their rations. But few had any stomach for it. All of them were wet and shivering, most of them had been made violently sick by the constant tossing of the boat, few could even lift their heads. There would be ten hours of darkness before the sky would lighten. The night seemed endless. As for the captain, the wind and the sea cunningly came at him from two sides. The young mate was always to remember him thus, had

only to close his eyes in order to see once more the captain's dark silhouette crouched watchfully at the tiller, all through the night.

When daylight came, the captain was still at the tiller. He had meant to hoist sail at the first sign of dawn; but the graying sky revealed a wildly running sea. Captain Kent saw that it would be suicidal to attempt to run before the gale, impossible to resume the course northwest; if he should attempt it, the pursuing seas would instantly have overtaken and foundered them. But after delaying another hour, in the vain hope that the wind might abate, he made a scrap of sail and set a course to northeastward, paralleling the trend of the coast. Fortune attended the decision: there was a strong three-knot current running down the coast; and this current shouldered the boat to the west, in precisely the direction they wished to go.

An hour later, at 7 in the morning, they sighted land. They saw the peaks of high mountains. They were perhaps thirty-five miles distant. The men shouted.

"If this wind holds," the captain told them, "we ought to fetch it before nightfall."

Wet and miserable as they had been throughout the night, the men cheered up immediately. They joked, laughed, sang. The boat leaped on.

But in the forenoon the wind and sea began to moderate; and by afternoon the wind had died down until it was no more than a light breeze. The men fretted. Soon they begged to be allowed to get out the oars, to help out the sail. They took turns at the long-handled sweeps, working in half-hour tricks. Soon the sun came out, hot over the tip of Africa, and every man stripped off his rain-soaked clothing and spread it out to dry upon the thwarts. The warmth cheered them. Soon they began singing again, roaring bawdily. "Wait, hold on a minute," bellowed one seaman. "There's a song about Cap'n Bligh. D'ye remember, the old guy that was cap'n of the *Bounty*, and how him and his men

rowed after the ship was sunk? Sure, it was in the movies! We'll sing it, only, instead of Bligh, let's say Kent!" Grinning, the men sang the Ballad of Cap'n Kent . . .

Captain Kent, sitting in the stern-sheets with his arm over the tiller, listened and smiled, well pleased. He was bringing his men through. He forgot that he had neither eaten nor slept nor known one instant without tensest strain for more than thirty hours. These were good boys, good men!

The warmth of the sun was good, yes, but its glare upon the sea wasn't doing his eyes any good. They had got full of fuel oil when he had jumped off the ship; and they were pretty bloodshot now. It was kind of difficult to keep them open. But he had to keep them open, just the same, for it was he who was steering the boat. "Got to keep them open," he repeated to himself, over and over. "Got to keep them open."

A man has to make his own luck.

As the land grew nearer—that was queer, it wasn't the boat that was drawing closer to the land, it was the land growing closer to the boat—the captain saw that two of the mountains seemed to draw apart, seeming to waver dizzily above the cruel glare upon the surface of the sea. Were they splitting apart, did the pitiless sun mock his bloodshot eyes, was it a delusion? No, they were steadying down, now, they stopped their crazy dancing, and the opening between them remained. There was, without mistake, a split between the two mountains. To right and left of it the cliffs rose very sheer, straight up and down.

Captain Kent muttered to himself. "There must be a river coming out between those two cliffs," he said. "A river; and there's where I'm going."

The boat crept slowly on. At about 4 in the afternoon, when they were no more than six miles off shore, they found the seawater very muddy and encountered a strong current that moved outward from the land. The captain's blistered lips parted in a grin. His guess had been good. This current, this muddiness,

was undoubtedly from the river flowing out from between those cliffs. The luck was holding . . .

In another hour of slow progress, they had come close enough so that they could see, high on the cliff on their port bow, a tiny signal-house. Good, the coast was not uninhabited!

Captain Kent began to think of the landing. There would certainly be surf rolling in upon that flat beach. It would call for careful handling of the boat, or the surf would tumble it end over end. And it was hard to see clearly, as one steered straight into the glare of the sinking sun. Captain Kent's eyes were swollen nearly shut now. He could see at all only by shielding them with one hand, squinting between the fingers.

"Go up to the bow, mister," he said to the mate. "Watch for an opening in the breakers."

As they drew still closer in, they could see people all along the cliff, people who had climbed by the footpath from the nearby village. They waved, pointing at white surf that was breaking over some submerged rocks, and motioned the boat to avoid that danger. Captain Kent had already put the tiller over. They passed the rocks, they came to the outer line of breakers. The sails had already been lowered, they would run in on the lifting seas. The men clung to the sides of the boat as Captain Kent steered her in. "Look out, cap'n!" some shouted in terror as the boat rose among the thundering rollers. "You'll turn us over!"

Captain Kent motioned them to silence. They were good men, they just didn't understand. You learn how to bring a small boat through surf, if you've been born on the coast of Maine.

Fifty men ran down to help them, as they came to the beach. Cars were waiting, to take them to the village. There was a doctor ready with first-aid, even before they left the beach. He treated those who had suffered the most—Hoffman, the Navy Lieutenant; the gunner; and Pete Haracz, the radio operator. It was all right.

Captain Kent felt good. The doctor had bathed his swollen and bloodshot eyes with boric acid and had then swabbed them with some sort of soothing oil. Captain Kent knew that everything would be all right, now. The luck was holding.

The luck held. The second mate's boat, Petersen's, came in with its eighteen men, all safe and sound, next day. The third mate's boat, Horrkovich's, with its damaged stern, was blown off its course and was sighted by no one for seven days. But there was enough water and rations aboard it, and they kept alive.

There was even tobacco. Or, at least, the third mate had his pipe, and once an hour he would pass it around to all the others. That was a help. On the eighth day, they were picked up by a west-bound ship, far out at sea; twelve men were still in the boat—the chief engineer, Larsen, the third mate, Horrkovich, and ten others. But the first assistant engineer had died in the boat the first night, the night of Friday the Thirteenth. They had buried him at sea.

As soon as the twelve men were put ashore at Cape Town by the ship that had picked them up, a delegation of them went to hunt up a priest.

"We don't belong to your church, father," they said, standing in front of him. "But could you say some sort of a special prayer for him? He belonged to the church. We'll pay whatever it costs."

There was a special mass said. But the priest would take no money from them.

* * *

On the voyage home, someone said to Captain Kent one day: "What's the first thing you're going to order when you get ashore, captain? A steak?"

Captain Kent smiled. "I'll tell you what I'd like," he said. "I hope they'll give me enough time to get to Swan's Island

and have me a mess of Swan's Island chowder before I go out again. That's what I'd like."

II. THE MATE

One of the youngest captains in the Company's service was Captain Ernest Lewerenz. His sea training had begun when he was only sixteen. It began with his enlistment as a cadet on the Massachusetts naval school ship, the Nantucket, in 1923. The Nantucket was the old square-rigged sailing ship, fitted with auxiliary steam power, which had long belonged to the Navy as the USS Ranger, named after John Paul Jones's first ship. In his three years' course on board the Nantucket, which included long cruises at sea, he learned seamanship thoroughly, was graduated at nineteen, and almost immediately passed the examinations which gave him his papers as a ship's officer in the merchant marine.

His blondness made him appear younger than he really was. At thirty-five he didn't look more than twenty-five. He looked like a boy just out of college—a big, husky, powerfully built young fellow, with an engagingly boyish grin; you would have said he had been a plunging halfback on the football team. His face was pleasant and ruddy, his hair blond as straw; his moustache was like stiff yellow straw. His pink forehead was often beaded with moisture; he was a healthy young giant, who sweat easily.

He joined the Company in 1936, as a second officer. Six years later he was appointed chief officer of the *Excello*, under the command of Captain Kent. When the *Excello* was torpedoed and sunk, No. 1 lifeboat—which would have been commanded by Captain Kent—jammed in the falls as it was being lowered and was carried down with the ship. The captain clung to a raft, until he was picked up by the mate, Lewerenz, in charge of No. 2 lifeboat. The young mate's remembrance of the exhausting night which followed, a night in which the small boat, crowded with nineteen men, was saved from foundering in the violent

gale and heavy seas only by the captain's expert seamanship, was of his captain's steady handling of the boat against all the vicious blows of the seas.

They reached land the next night. They were in East Africa. A week later, at Durban, a small Filipino freighter, the *Aurora*, out of Ilo Ilo, bound for Baltimore, took Lewerenz and others of the *Excello's* survivors on board, for the passage home.

Except for the *Excello's* men, and Captain Ventoso, the master of the *Aurora*, there were no white men aboard. The crew were Filipinos and Chinese. Among the passengers was a Chinese woman of culture, whose husband was secretary to the Chinese Legation at Ottawa, Canada. She was on her way to join him. Another passenger was a Chinese military officer, an engineer in the Chinese aviation corps, who was on his way to the United States to study plane construction.

From Cape Town, in the early weeks of December, the *Aurora* zigzagged her way cautiously across the south Atlantic, keeping a sharp lookout for enemy submarines. By Christmas Eve she was nearing the bulge of Brazil, but was still two hundred and fifty miles off shore. Captain Ventoso's spirits rose.

"We've dodged them," he remarked to Lewerenz, that night.

Lewerenz nodded. "I hope so," he replied. "But I'll feel much better, captain, about three days from now. I've had one ship sunk under me. That's enough."

Nevertheless, Lewerenz slept well. At half-past seven the next morning—Christmas morning—he was under the showerbath, scrubbing himself lustily and singing to beat Bing Crosby. He had just got the soap sluiced from his blond head, when he heard men yelling on the deck, overhead.

Running feet thudded over his head; men were running to their stations at the after gun. He heard the gun roar. Once. Twice! They must be shelling an enemy submarine!

Lewerenz dropped his towel. Before it touched the floor, the crash came. The terrific blast of the exploding torpedo, striking

the ship at the waterline, shook the freighter from stem to stern. Everything fell. Lewerenz, thrown against the wall, rebounded and grabbed a pair of pants, his belt and his papers. As he ran for the boatdeck the thought struck him that by this time in the morning, about four thousand miles away, his two kids up there in Rutherford would probably be up in their little pajamas and pestering their mother to let them see what was in their Christmas stockings.

As he reached the deck he saw that one of the two lifeboats the freighter carried was useless. The explosion had smashed it to bits. But the starboard boat would hold sixty persons, all that they had on board. It was lowered quickly. Many scrambled into it before it was lowered, but some jumped to it after it reached the water. Among these was the Chinese woman, the legation secretary's wife. She struck her side as she jumped into the boat, but, in spite of the pain, sat silent. One of the Filipino crew boys landed on the gunwale of the boat as he jumped, striking himself in the groin. He gritted his teeth and said nothing. Two others of the crew had been badly burned by the explosion. From the arms of one of them all the skin had been burned, so that he sat holding them away from his body—and still smiled.

Lewerenz looked toward the submarine. It was coming towards them from the landward side. It had fired its torpedo as the ship was outlined against the morning sun. The submarine was a very large one. It was Italian. An officer and several of its crew were standing around its conning tower, looking at the people in the lifeboat. The officer hailed the boat, beckoning for it to come closer. The submarine came to a stop and lay rising and falling sluggishly in the swells.

As the lifeboat drew closer to it, Lewerenz heard the officer shouting that he wanted the captain, "*il commandante.*" One of the ship's messboys, who spoke Italian, shouted back that the captain had been drowned. The Italian officer shook his head angrily, unbelieving. Captain Ventoso remained discreetly silent.

With its nose touching the submarine, the lifeboat rose and fell beside it. At the Italian commander's beckoning, the mess-boy and another of the freighter's crew, a seaman, scrambled on board the sub. Captain Ventoso hesitated, then started after them. The Italian officer was already questioning the two men when Captain Ventoso joined them. Captain Ventoso interrupted. "I am the captain," he said. The Italian turned on him angrily. "Oh, no, you're not!" he screamed. "Don't try to fool me with that dodge!" Placing his palm against the captain's chest, he shoved. The captain toppled back into the lifeboat.

The submarine officer's eye still searched the crowded lifeboat to find someone who seemed to be in command. Oriental faces, only, were upturned to his. His glance fell with satisfaction on Lewerenz, big and blond.

"You, there!" he shouted. "*You* are the *commandante*! Come here!"

Lewerenz made his way slowly to the bow of the boat, his mind racing. The Italian officer stretched out his hand, as the boat rose on a wave, so that Lewerenz might grasp it and be pulled on board the submarine.

Lewerenz reached for the outstretched hand and, with pretended clumsiness, missed it. The boat dropped with the dropping wave, rose with the next.

Lewerenz missed the outstretched hand a second time.

"If you only knew it, baby," he whispered to himself, "I could keep this up for a hell of a long time!"

He kept it up. The Italian officer danced on the deck with rage. The sea was getting heavier. Finally the lifeboat's nose thumped against the submarine's hull. The Italian could stand it no longer. "Get away, get away!" he yelled, waving his hands like a windmill. "Do you want to sink us, you blockhead?"

Lewerenz let himself fall back into the bottom of the lifeboat and lay there. He rolled over. It was the only way he could hide that smile.

The submarine moved off, taking its two prisoners with it, circled the floating wreckage of the little freighter and finally departed from the scene.

On the lifeboat, they hoisted a sail. They started for the Brazilian coast, only two hundred and forty miles away. If they were lucky, they might make it in ten days. The sailor whose skin had been burned from his arms sat holding them out from his sides. He said nothing.

One of the mates had taken the tiller. Lewerenz and the captain moved among the men huddled in the bottom of the boat.

All through that day and the next they managed to keep a semblance of cheerfulness, but the hours dragged on interminably; the tropic sun beat down, the cupfuls of water which the captain doled out never seemed enough to relieve their thirst; there was little breeze, and their progress seemed pitifully slow. Lewerenz tried not to think of the little Christmas tree which he knew was standing, bright with tinsel, in his children's room. He had tried to draw the captain into talk, but the captain had answered only in broken words. His mind was on his lost ship. He sat at times with his head buried in his hands.

Christmas Day passed, and the day that followed. The Sunday morning dawned. Lewerenz, thinking of the Italian that had sunk their ship, recalled his own last voyage to Italy before war had begun. In Rome, he had seen Il Duce himself, cheered by the populace as he drove to mass.

"About 11 o'clock in Rome," he said aloud. "I suppose our friend Mussolini is going into the cathedral just about now."

Captain Ventoso nodded. "Let him pray for his soul," he said bitterly.

Lewerenz moved about among the men. One of the Excello's men, who had served in her gun crew, looked up at him with a grin. "Have you heard the news, mister?" he asked. "We're going to be picked up at two o'clock this afternoon."

Lewerenz thought the man was joking. "Oh, quit your kidding," he retorted. "How do you dream that stuff?"

"No, I mean it, sir," said the sailor earnestly. "Maybe it's only a hunch, but I'll bet on it. You just wait."

The long hours of the morning dragged by. Lewerenz stared again and again at the sky, until his eyes ached, but it was empty. He wondered why the sailor had been so confident. It wasn't possible that a plane would come. No one would ever find them.

But against his own will he found himself glancing again and again at his wrist watch.

Two o'clock came at last. And still the sky was empty.

At five minutes past two, someone in the bow of the boat shouted, "There's a plane!"

And there it was. In another moment they heard the drone of its motors. All the Filipino boys jumped to their feet and yelled. "Sit down!" the officers shouted. The plane came closer. It circled overhead. Lewerenz couldn't believe his eyes. It was a big Catalina flying boat, a Navy plane.

As they watched it, joyfully waving, the plane began again to climb and to turn away from them. Their hearts sank. Surely its pilot had seen them. Was he going away, abandoning them to their fate? The plane faded out of sight, into the southeast. Men sat there chewing their lips in an agony of doubt, and then, within five minutes, they caught sight of him again. He was coming back! This time, as he circled over the lifeboat, they caught the glittering of his blinker signal. "Aid . . . is . . . coming." Lewerenz and two or three others read the flashing dots and dashes as he repeated the message. It wasn't any dream. They were saved!

The plane circled, then flew to the northward. The men in the lifeboat told each other that it had surely sighted some friendly ship in the south and they waited confidently. In an hour, sure enough, they caught sight of the smoke on the horizon. Slowly the steamer came toward them. Again the plane re-

turned, again it blinked its reassuring message, and again it went away.

"Ship to the northward!" someone shouted.

This new vessel was no freighter. Within ten minutes they could see the white spray flying from her bows. She was a destroyer. In twenty minutes she was within a mile of the lifeboat. She too blinked a signal which they read—"Will stand by till you are picked up." From the south the freighter came up slowly. The destroyer escorted her to the lifeboat, then circled about them, keeping guard against any lurking submarine.

The freighter was the *Testbank*, one of the *Bank* liners, a British ship. From her bridge, a hearty English voice came down to them: "Have you any sick or wounded among you? The destroyer will take them."

The Chinese woman and the three injured seamen were lifted carefully on board the destroyer, while the *Testbank* hoisted the lifeboat and its occupants to her own deck. The destroyer signalled good-bye and leaped away. In half an hour she was hull down on the horizon.

Eight days later, young Lewerenz and the rest were landed in Trinidad. An American Export Airlines plane made room for him. He landed in New York on the sixth of January. There was news for him at the Company's offices.

"We've got a ship for you to take out," they announced. "She's loading for North Africa."

"Who's her skipper?" he asked.

"You," they told him.

It was news that his wife must hear. He told her about that. But he didn't tell her much about the rest of it. He himself had had very little trouble, he said.

"A sort of funny thing happened, though, a couple of weeks ago," he told her. "I happened to meet up with an Italian fellow. I didn't know then that I was going to be promoted. And this guy, mind you, had never seen me before in his life. Maybe he

was just a natural-born fortune teller. He kept calling me *com-mandante!* That means 'captain,' you know! Pretty smart guy, don't you think?"

"What was so smart about *that?*" demanded his wife, indignantly. "*Anybody* would know you ought to be a captain!"

XII

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

THE EXCELLER, commanded by Captain Hugh Switzer, came back from a voyage to Bombay on the thirteenth of September. There was no rest for her. On the very next day preparations were begun for her next voyage; and on the twenty-fifth of September she sailed, on a mission so secret that not even her captain was entrusted with it on that day.

It was not until a month later, when she had already crossed the Atlantic and was within ten days' sail of Gibraltar, that he was given the orders which disclosed to him the true destination of his ship:

She was to share in that breathless adventure, the invasion of North Africa. He was to take her into the Mediterranean and bring her to Algiers.

They were at sea now, on this twenty-sixth day of October; but the ship was not alone. Ahead, astern, to right and to left were others. It was a sight to make the pulses leap. Lifting his binoculars to his eyes, he counted in that wide circle of gray sea forty-two ships like his own; and around these forty-two raced twenty others, war vessels escorting the troop transports and cargo carriers. Now that their destination was revealed to them, it was impossible to repress a quickening of the blood, a tightening of the lips. This was it!

How majestic the whole enterprise was, they could not know, even then. They could not guess that beyond their range of vision,

even then, were countless other ships, all moving, like themselves, in that daring sea-task; all, hundreds upon hundreds of ships, the greatest armada in recorded history, converging upon the northern ports of Africa. It was enough that their own destination was now declared to them, they need not wonder about others: what they themselves had under their hands would keep them busy. . . . But the men of the *Exceller* would have been pleased, no less, had they known that in the mighty invasion fleet far to the south of them there were two other ships of their own Company, the *Excalibur* and the *Exeter*, bigger sisters of the *Exceller*. This they did not know; but they did distinguish, steaming along beside them, a transport ship whose appearance was strangely familiar.

"That's the *Almaak*, she's a Navy transport," somebody said. "The Navy owns her." But the man beside him shook his head. "Maybe that's what they call her now," he said. "But you can't fool me. I know her. That's the old *Executor*, she was one of the Company ships, too. She's got a Navy crew on her now, but her chief engineer was a Company man. I knew him. He was third assistant on her, before the Navy took her over."

"A guy told me the *Excalibur* and the *Exeter* were going to be on this job, too," said the first man. "Jeez, that would be somethin', wouldn't it, four ships from the same Line, all on this same job! *Excalibur*, *Exeter*, *Executor*, *Exceller*—that's showin' 'em, *I'll* say!"

"Maybe so," said the other, "but pipe down. We ain't there yet."

The convoy went on. On the fifth day of November it had approached within a hundred miles of the entrance into the Straits of Gibraltar. If they came closer, in daylight, they would certainly be observed by hostile watchers as they passed through the narrow lane between the African coast and that of Spain. But the weather was on their side, that day. Clouds overhung them; rain squalls, sweeping over the decks, helped to hide

them. And they had timed their entrance, so that they might pass through the Straits under cover of night. In the darkness and rain the long lines of the ships went through, unseen; but every man, on every ship, felt his nerves tightening, for each knew that discovery, soon, was inevitable now.

"Won't be long, now, fella." "Any minute."

The dark hours of the night seemed endless, as the sixty ships moved silently along, but as the sky lightened faintly in the east they were well within the Mediterranean. It was partly cloudy, with rain hanging over the horizon. Abeam to port was faintly seen the gray bulk of England's fortress, Gibraltar. They went on, heading almost due east. But shortly after passing Gibraltar signal flags began to flutter from the escort command, and blinker lights to wink; and about half of the convoy, in obedience to these orders, began to draw away from the rest, on a course slightly south of east, heading for Oran. In another hour or two they were out of sight.

The *Exceller* kept on her way. Captain Switzer's eyes rested upon her with affection and with pride. She was a new ship. He had commanded her ever since her launching, hardly more than a year before. In that one year he had taken her three times to Indian seaports, and had brought her safely back; he had reason to be proud of her.

He himself was one of the youngest shipmasters in the Company's employ. Virginian born, tall, blue eyed, he was only forty-three and seemed even younger. But he had been at sea for twenty-five years, ever since he was nineteen. He had held a Master's papers ever since he was twenty-five. He had been a ship's officer "with the Company" for twenty years. Young he might be, in appearance—but he was a veteran mariner.

And his officers, he reflected with pride, were dependable men, every one of them. The mate, "Tiny" Lebzeltern; Kamin-sky, the second officer; Sheehan, the third; Warren, the junior third; the engineer officers, Smouse, the Chief, Riley, his first

assistant, Wilk, the second, and Joe DiGiralamo, the third assistant engineer, who had been born in Sicily, but who was as good an American as any of them—all these, good men, every one. They had all been “with the Company” before. Why, even the steward, the chief cook, and one of the messmen had been with the *Exceller* before! As for his crew, the twenty men in the deck and engine-room watches, they were tops. You couldn’t ask for better men. As for young Lieutenant “Dick” Bellman, USN, and the eighteen bluejackets, signalmen and gunners, who made up the *Exceller*’s armed guard, they were Navy. They knew their business . . . Forty-nine good men, good men all.

He thought grimly of the cargo beneath the *Exceller*’s decks—sixteen hundred tons of anti-aircraft guns and army trucks, the ammunition and army supplies already loaded in the trucks. That stuff would move out fast. Besides the thirty Coast Guardsmen on board the *Exceller* who were to help in handling the invasion barges carried on other ships in the convoy, he was carrying one hundred and sixty American soldiers, who would get those trucks and guns into action as fast as they were put ashore.

Well, here they were now, well into the Mediterranean, and the sea and sky were still empty of enemy ships or planes. Rain-clouds off there on the horizon . . . If their luck held, maybe there wouldn’t be any planes that day . . .

Two years! Yes, it had been more than two years, he reflected. The last time he had entered the Mediterranean had been in June of 1940, his ship the very last of the Company’s freightships to enter, before Italy declared war on France. Well, he was coming back in, now . . .

There was something a trifle ironic, a trifle exasperating, about this entrance. Off to the right and to the left were the familiar coasts of Spain and of Africa, coasts that every skipper of “the Line” could find his way along in the dark, as easily as he could find his way about his own cabin. The people and the ports of Spain and France and Italy had welcomed them then. Why

did it have to be so grimly different now? Whose fault was that? Certainly not America's! And now he was headed for Algiers, a port that he knew well. He had made friends there. Confound it, a man likes to go into places where he has friends! Instead of which, this time, you could be certain—

That's enough of that. That gets you nowhere. Just keep on going . . .

Nothing happened, that morning. At midday, the usual boat drill and fire drill were held, just as they had been held throughout the voyage. In addition, the officer commanding the Coast Guard detail gave instructions in the use of the gas masks. The whole drill went through like clockwork. In twenty minutes drill was dismissed. The men went back to their duties. The unremitting watching of the sea and skies continued.

Late that afternoon, a lookout spied it. It was a single plane, flying northward, far overhead, cutting straight across the course of the convoy. Men went to their stations at a jump. The plane came overhead. Gunners' fingers itched as they strained their eyes upward at it. But no order came to fire. Perhaps it was a neutral, out of Spanish Morocco. It passed out of sight, still flying toward Malaga, in Spain . . .

Night came on, and the convoy ploughed through a dozen wearisome hours more, a black, rainless night of tension. Somewhere, that plane had landed. Somewhere, it had made report of what it had seen.

The fruit of its evil service was not ready until dawn. Then, just at daybreak, out of the north, came what seemed to be a black bat, cutting swiftly across the gray dawn. It was an enemy torpedo-plane.

As it passed over the convoy, strung out over two miles of sea, it swooped. A mile ahead of the *Exceller* was another merchant vessel, once the African *Meteor*, now serving as a transport, thickly crowded with American troops. As the plane passed over her, the men of the *Exceller* saw the black dot of the torpedo

drop from the plane. A moment later, a dull thud came faintly to their ears. It had struck. As they drew past the Meteor, five minutes later, she had stopped, rocking in the low swell, but showed no visible damage. Only the fluttering signal flags told the story: "Propeller damaged, cannot turn engines, request permission to drop out of convoy."

One of the escorting destroyers dashed back to her and remained, with orders to stay with her. The convoy went on . . .

In the wheelroom of the *Exceller*, the mate jotted six brief words in the rough-log: "05:35. Air attack. Partly cloudy, low swell."

The plane vanished, and no more came. Sixteen hours passed, while the ships plodded on eastward for another one hundred and sixty miles, and still the enemy sent out no more scout. Night came. At precisely twenty minutes past nine o'clock—"21:20" it was logged—the convoy came to its prearranged stop, its propellers idling. The ships lay in the darkness, five miles off the port of Algiers. They had come, in two days, through five hundred miles of enemy waters, had not lost a single ship, and had arrived at their destination one hour and ten minutes ahead of the time-table that had been worked out weeks before.

For it had been arranged, by an underground communications system of miraculous efficiency, that if all shore preparations were in readiness, a Free French plane was to fly out from shore at precisely 10:30 on the night of Saturday, November 7, and drop green and white flares as a signal that the transports might begin sending in the invasion barges.

Waiting for this pilot in the darkness, the convoy began separating itself into three parts. One group was to steam straight for the harbor, to seize the docks. The second began moving toward Cape Matifou, northeast of the port, with orders to take the forts east of the city; and the third, consisting of transports, the *Exceller* and the *Executor* among them, was to land its men on Surcouf Beach, just eastward of the cape.

To the last least detail, all had gone as planned. And then came the unpredictable.

The drone of a plane became faintly audible, a plane unseen in the darkness. Ships' bells began softly chiming their two double strokes and then a single one. "Five bells!" Was it a Free French plane, coming just as had been planned? Or was it an enemy reconnaissance plane? Men clinched their hands in an agony of doubt. Their palms sweat.

The plane circled lower, coming so close to the dark shapes of the waiting ships that it seemed as if the pilot were peering, short of sight, to make sure whether they were friends or foes. And still his flare was not dropped. Some gunner could stand it no longer. Surely the plane was an enemy!

And the silence of the night was shattered by the startling clamor of the ack-ack guns on the convoy's escorting warships.

The plane rocked in the explosions around it.

Then, and not till then, the pilot dropped his flares. Their green and white radiance lighted up the dark sea, the darker mass of ships. He was streaking it back to shore now, that Frenchman, doubtless cursing. Through their glasses, the officers on the *Exceller's* deck caught a momentary glimpse of him, and then the flares died out and the night was blacker than before. And on the instant the three divisions of the convoy began their appointed tasks.

But concealment was over. Whether it was the green flare or the chatter of the guns at sea that had ripped all open, open it was. First to meet the enemy fire were the transports that had headed for the entrance of the bay. There was an enemy observation post on Cape Matifou, garrisoned by no more than thirty German soldiers. But at the sound of the firing, these rushed into the French fort nearby and persuaded its officers—perhaps at the point of the bayonet—that the British were attacking France. The guns of the fort, on high ground, commanded the entrance to the harbor. The Germans, in a frenzy, put them

into action. The American transports went steadily on, the shells bursting harmlessly over them. For two hours the Germans fired wildly from this fort, without hitting a single vessel. Then, in despair, since by this time the ships of that division had entered the harbor, they angrily ceased firing.

In the meantime, the *Exceller*, after having been maneuvered through sixty minutes of this cannonading, with the other seven transports in her division had reached her assigned position off Surcouf Beach and began the unloading of the barges upon which the light Army tanks were to be ferried to shore.

The unloading had begun at precisely half past eleven; an hour and twenty minutes later, at ten minutes to one, all the barges were afloat and were on their way toward the beach. At one o'clock, the troops had been landed. But all through the night the ships' crews worked on, lowering more cargo whenever lighters became available.

Sunday morning dawned, gray and cloudy, with low fog drifting over the surface of the water, half hiding the line of American transports. Exultant news ran from ship to ship: "It's going fine! The airport has been taken! Every objective on shore has been taken, except that fort on Cape Matifou!" The tired deck crews, which had been at work all night, drove at their daylight task with fresh energy. All day long the landing barges, thick with troops, continued to go to the beach, although the wind was freshening and a surf began to rise. One or two enemy planes began to appear, flying very high, disregarding the ships and attempting only to hit the landing barges as they neared the beach. The gun crews of the transports opened fire upon them. But the shells of their .50 caliber guns burst harmlessly far below the planes. The *Exceller's* men cursed.

"Damn it, they're out of range," they muttered bitterly. "What's the matter with using a couple of them Army guns we got in the hold? They ain't doin' no good where they are."

"Get 'em mounted," said an officer, curtly. Winches rumbled.

Up came two 40-mm guns and were swung into place on the deck. Their Army crews jumped to man them. But by now the planes were gone. The landing barges continued ferrying their men to the beach, through the increasing surf.

At noon, the thud of heavy guns to the westward was heard. Two British heavy cruisers had moved in toward Cape Matifou, and, from their station at sea, out of range of the guns of the fort on the cape, were beginning to pound the fort. The dull explosions went on relentlessly for almost an hour. Then a white flag fluttered over the fort.

For five hours, ever since the first grayness of daylight, the *Exceller* had been lying close inshore at Surcouf Beach. At daylight, in spite of the fog, her officers had taken bearings to check her offshore position, had sent her slowly in, and at a few minutes before 9 o'clock her port anchor had been let go, five shackles of anchor chain had rumbled out into twenty-four fathoms of water, and she lay at anchor, a half mile from the beach. It was from this anchorage that the landing-barges had been sent in. It was now 1 o'clock. For another two hours the barges were sent in; but by 3 o'clock, the surf had grown too heavy for further landings. But on each of the eight transports lying there side by side, rising and falling gently to their restraining cables, the deck crews were working without rest. It would not be long before these ships must go on into the surrendered city, to discharge their cargoes; and all hatches were being got ready for that task.

"Here they come!"

The three ear-splitting shrieks of the whistles drowned the lookout's cry. Yes, there they were—six dark shapes, high overhead, swooping out of the gray clouds, coming from the eastward. Men dropped their work and ran to their stations. The anchored ships crouched, waiting for the bombs.

The *Exceller* lay at the eastern end of the line, and would be the first over which they would pass. Captain Switzer, binoculars

to his eyes, studied them. Yes, they were enemy planes—Nazi bombers, Italian torpedo planes.

As he watched, the first torpedo left a plane on the left of the formation and began its fall. Behind him, he heard the ship's clock chiming its four double strokes. Eight bells. It seemed as though the torpedo would never get through its falling.

But it struck the water at last. The white arrow of its wake headed straight for his ship. The *Exceller* seemed to wait, anchored, helpless. The torpedo streaked past her, six feet away from her sides . . .

A second torpedo fell, dropping as lazily as the first. This one passed twenty feet away. It went on for half a mile, skipping through the dull green seas like a pebble tossed across a ruffled pond, to where the largest of the eight transports, the *Leedstown*, was anchored. It struck astern, shattering the *Leedstown's* propeller. She stayed afloat.

Wave after wave of enemy planes followed the first. Captain Switzer counted twenty-four in all. But their torpedoes, after the one that had hit the *Leedstown*, all missed; and all their bombs burst harmlessly. The racket of the ack-ack guns, an ear-splitting racket, would scarcely stop before it would begin again, as a fresh wave of planes came over. The raid had been going on for three quarters of an hour. No one asked, "Why the hell do we keep lying here, why don't we up anchor and get the hell away from here?" It was their business to stay there and take it. They stayed.

At 15 minutes to 5, a German bomber dropped two bombs directly at the *Exceller*. The first struck the water about one hundred feet away, on the port beam. The second landed about twenty feet astern, but, continuing downwards on a slant, exploded directly beneath the stern and very nearly beneath No. 6 hold.

The stern of the *Exceller* was lifted bodily into the air, several feet.

Men were hurled flat upon the decks.

As her ten thousand tons of steel dropped again, a mountain of spray rose above her stern and thundered down upon the sprawling men.

The deck guns, having paused for no longer than it takes a man to draw a single breath, burst out again into their ferocious clamor.

Dusk was deepening now, and it was easier to see the glow of the tracer bullets against the darkening sky. Just at dark, two of the enemy planes were shot down . . . "Nuts to *you*," whispered the Exceller, watching them fall . . .

Her skipper had already rung down to the engine room. A voice answered. "That you, Chief?" he asked quietly. "A bomb astern, a near miss. Your engines okay?"

"Everything seems to be okay here," the Chief said cheerfully. "I've sent aft to have a look around. Let you know in a minute."

In a few minutes, back came the call:

"All clear here, Cap'n. We've got a leak in the after-peak tank, and the after shaft-alley is leaking some, but we'll take care of it. Nothing serious. Propellers are okay, and we can turn the engines over."

By the time the leaks were plugged, the soundings showed that two feet of oil had leaked from the afterpeak tank into No. 6 hatch, and that three feet of water was sloshing around in No. 5 cofferdam, the space between deck and hold. There was nice wet work for the black gang to do, cramped there in the darkness, while the air-raid alerts moaned somewhere overhead, all through the night.

During the night, the wind increased. At 3:35 the watch reported the anchor was dragging. The skipper ordered the engines started and worked the ship cautiously about in an attempt to ease the strain on the chain. Shortly before 5, orders came to be in readiness to proceed into the harbor of Algiers. The anchor

was hove up, and for the next hour the *Exceller* loitered on the spot, waiting for further orders. It was as difficult an hour as any, for there was nothing to do but wait . . .

At daybreak the enemy air raiders came again. Their attack lasted for fifty minutes. And at the end of the fifty minutes, the *Exceller* reported, in three words: "No damage sustained."

Ten minutes after the planes had departed, leaving the crippled *Leedstown* behind, the transports began to move in dignified procession along the twenty-mile course that would bring them to Algiers itself. It took them three hours, from 7 nearly to 10. Once in the outer harbor, they moved to anchorage on the side opposite the city, and outside the breakwater. The *Exceller* dropped her starboard anchor at 9:41, and ran out four shackles of chain. The men got a little rest, but at 1 o'clock the bombers came over again. They were driven off, but not until the *Dempo*, a Dutch transport, was damaged. Shortly before 2, the thirty Coast Guards aboard the *Exceller*, their work with the barges completed, were transferred to an American warship lying nearby. An hour later, the *Exceller* and the transport which had once been known as the *Executor*, of the same Line, were told to weigh anchor and proceed on, inside the breakwater and alongside the docks.

Extract from the *Exceller's* deck-log:

"15:15, anchor aweigh, proceeding to berth. 15:37, enemy bombers overhead."

They had been under way for only twelve minutes. The docks were not an hour away; they were so close that you could see men hurrying along them. But now, overhead, the sky was black with planes. It was, to put it mildly, exasperating. Was the *Exceller* to get so close to discharging her precious tanks and guns and munitions as this, only to be lost at the very dock?

Captain Switzer could see the docks clearly through his glasses. There was a small boat, a motor launch, putting out. It was heading this way. Oh, yes, that would be the pilot, poor devil. Shrap-

nel was already spattering the face of the harbor, and jets of spray from bomb "misses" were spouting here and there. No, emphatically, Captain Switzer did not envy that pilot . . .

The uproar of the guns was now unbelievable. This was the biggest raid of all. The planes were everywhere. And the guns of seventy ships, transports and war vessels alike, a full fifteen hundred guns, were blasting at them simultaneously, in one sustained bellow of sound.

Captain Switzer kept his eyes fixed on the approaching pilot launch, threading its way between the showers of splashing steel. "Now, I wonder if that could be Cesare," he muttered. "A good little man. It will be nice seeing him again, if that's him."

They had got under way at a quarter past 3, it was now nearly 4, and that infernal cloud of enemy planes had been circling overhead for more than twenty minutes. It seemed like twenty hours. But you couldn't hurry. You couldn't go through the breakwater until you had got your pilot aboard. You simply went on, creeping on, while the geysers of the falling bombs erupted around you, and you kept your mind on other things, things that had to be done. There was, for example, the accommodation-ladder that had to be lowered for the pilot. Well, for God's sake, lower it! *That* will keep you busy! Easy, there—easy does it. So!

There was almost always something encouraging to be seen, when you got a quick glance upward. They were hitting those planes. Those hundreds of guns on the ships were filling the sky with their black puffs, and scarcely any sixty seconds would tick by without seeing at least one of those planes pitch downward or begin to trail a telltale streamer of smoke, and begin to streak it away for land. They got twenty-two of those planes that day. The wreckage of those that didn't plunge into the water was afterwards found in the fields for miles around. Even now, as the *Exceller* continued to move slowly closer to the approaching pilot-launch, and the continuing roar and rattle of the guns deafened

the ears, a plane was falling. It struck the water three hundred feet away and sank like a stone. And at the same instant the little pilot-launch darted in alongside the *Exceller*, like a rabbit that scuttles into the shelter of a boulder. The pilot leaped, and began coming up the side-ladder in breathless haste.

Yes, it *was* Cesare! He came into the bridgehouse mopping the sweat from his forehead, but with his sun-blackened face wreathed in smiles. "By the blessed Virgin of Ajaccio!" he exploded, "it is my old friend! I welcome you!"

Captain Switzer grinned as they shook hands and the swarthy little man tried to embrace him in sheer joy. "Yes, a nice sort of welcome!" he chuckled. "Is this what you call a welcome—you Italians upstairs throwing everything you've got at us?"

The pilot almost wept. "Never say that, Captain, not even for a joke!" he pleaded earnestly. "Me, I am not Italian! Never! I am a man of Corsica, I am born in Corsica, I swear it!"

"Have it your way," grinned the American. "Just lay off kissing me, and let's get going. We've got plenty to put on the dock."

They took the ship on in. It had been twenty minutes past 4 when the pilot stepped into the wheelhouse, and at 4:41, alongside the piers, the starboard anchor chain rumbled out through the hawse-pipe. A tug was waiting. In three minutes it had a line fast to the ship, aft. In twenty-six minutes it had a mooring cable fast to the pier from aft, and in ten minutes more the bow mooring line was ashore, and the *Exceller* was being warped in to the dock. Within twenty minutes more, she was moored, port side to the quay, and the pilot, beaming, was going down the ladder.

Four bombs had exploded close to the ship, as they were entering the breakwater, and though their concussion had made the *Exceller* tremble, the pilot had merely crossed himself, without taking his eyes off the channel ahead.

Captain Switzer gripped his hand as the pilot left the ship.

"Telephone the American Export Lines' agent, will you, as soon as you get ashore?" he asked. "Tell 'em we need stevedores, quick; tell 'em this is an American Export ship."

"I tell 'em," promised the pilot, grinning. "Joosta like old times!"

As he went down the ladder, the last of the enemy planes disappeared from the sky and the roar of the guns suddenly was shut off. It had been going on for two hours.

The silence was startling. Men who until now had been too busy to notice that the motion of the ship had ceased, looked up, surprised.

"My God!" they said. "We're *here*!"

They couldn't believe it. The Exceller had arrived at her destination, the five-thousand-mile voyage had been accomplished. They looked at each other, wondering. They were still alive.

Alive, yes, but without a moment to rest. The big ship groaned against the side of the quay. The surface of the harbor was unquiet, rising and falling from the seas outside the breakwater. Throughout the next three hours the deck crew was kept at it by the ship's officers, while additional hawsers were stretched from ship to pier, until the excessive surging was whipped and the ship lay quiet.

While they were at this, the agents to whom the pilot had telephoned came hurrying to the quay. There were three of them, three Frenchmen, who, for a year and a half, had been longing for this very day and had come to believe that this day would never come. They fell upon Captain Switzer with shouts of joy. They hugged him, all three at once.

"We could not believe it," they babbled, dabbing at the tears in their eyes. "The radio said that American troops were landing, but we could not believe it. We did not believe it, until we ourselves saw your troops on the streets. What is it that you want, captain? Stevedores? You shall have stevedores, of a surety! We will get you stevedores! We will rain stevedores on you!"

And they dashed off to make good their promise, if they had to comb every alley in Algiers before morning.

The night fell, the ship was blacked out, some men slept, but the officers and the armed guard slept not at all, patrolling the ship through the night. At daybreak came another air raid, lasting thirty-five minutes. No bombs fell near the *Exceller*, and two of the enemy planes were shot down. Men went to breakfast whistling. Hot coffee was good.

But the urgency for discharging the cargo without a moment's delay gave no rest. "Wait for the stevedores?" the mate rumbled. "Wait for nobody! Let's go!" And the men of the ship's crew fell to, at No. 6 hatch, before the last gulp of coffee had gone down. But within the half hour the ship was swarming with native Algerian roustabouts, dark-skinned pirates who tucked their tattered robes under their sashes and who worked like madmen, for joy of the American money that they had known of old. The three Frenchmen had carried out their round-up well.

All day long the cargo rumbled to the dock, and from stem to stern the ship resounded with the shouts of hurrying men. Men did not stop to eat, but ate as they ran. At 5 in the afternoon, an air-raid alert sounded, but work went on. Not until 8 o'clock at night, when the enemy planes came over again, was there an instant's pause, and then the interruption was for five minutes only. Resumed again, the unloading went on until darkness fell and made further work impossible, for a blackout was again ordered.

At 3 in the morning the attacking planes came over once again. "No damage," the captain noted curtly. At 9 o'clock there was another, at half-past seven in the evening came a third raid alert. The ship's crew and the native stevedores, who had begun work at dawn, worked without rest for sixteen hours that day. That night, just as the night before, instead of going to their bunks, the tired seamen were posted at the gangways, while the

ship's officers kept their watches sleeplessly through the night and the armed guard patrolled the blacked-out ship.

There was both good and bad news that day, Tuesday. They heard that the big transport, the Leedstown, which had first been hit while they were all anchored off Surcouf Beach on the Sunday, had been torpedoed again as she lay helpless there, in the fiercest of the enemy attacks, on Monday, and had sunk ; but that she had nevertheless managed, with several thousand men on board, to put every man safely ashore except eight. And they got news, too, that the crippled African Meteor, which had been struck as they were first nearing Algiers and had been left behind, had landed all her troops on a beach west of the city, without the loss of a man, and was now being towed into the harbor for repairs. But they couldn't even spare time to give her a cheer as she limped proudly in.

At 6 o'clock next morning, Thursday, they returned to the weary job of unloading. There were no more air raids that day, and by 3 in the afternoon the gangs of native stevedores were no longer needed and were paid off. The ship's crew and the one hundred and fifty soldiers worked on, and, though the blackout was repeated, kept at the job all through the night. Daylight came, and they were still at work. And by half-past ten, on the morning of Friday the thirteenth, they had lowered to the docks the last pound of cargo. There stood the long line of Army trucks, the array of anti-aircraft guns, the heaped boxes of ammunition and high-explosive—seven hundred tons of death to the enemy.

The Exceller had done her job once more.

At noon, the detachment of soldiers disembarked. The Exceller would be ready for her homeward trip as soon as orders came to her.

In the early afternoon, having moved out through the break-water into the outer harbor, she anchored to await those orders. Shortly before 7 the order came. In ten minutes the anchor was aweigh and she was proceeding seaward. Fifteen minutes later,

rounding Cape Matifou and setting his course for the westward, Captain Switzer could faintly make out in the gathering dusk the dark mass of the fort upon the cape—that fort which had been in the enemy's hands six days before, and which was now in the hands of the Allies.

He bent over the logbook. "19:10," he wrote. "Full ahead, departure. Mainly cloudy, with rain squalls in sight."

He grinned his boyish grin at the Second Officer. "Eddie," he said, "if we can get patched up a bit, somewhere, I shouldn't wonder if we will be home by Christmas!"

* * *

As far as the calendar went, it seemed as though the captain's cheerful prediction would come true. At a friendly port they put the ship into drydock, the damage astern which had been caused by the bombs at Surcouf Beach was repaired, and on the sixth of December the *Exceller* set off upon the Atlantic crossing. If all went well, there was no reason why that crossing should not be made within a dozen days, bringing them home a full week before Christmas.

But the sea had other plans.

The morning after their departure found them under a sky overcast with cold gray clouds from which rain fell at intervals, and staggering forward against a wind steadily increasing in violence. It blew out of the southwest, straight into their teeth, kicking up a rough sea. Empty of cargo, the ship carried only a thousand tons of ballast, rode high out of the water, and was therefore much more at the mercy of the sea than a heavily weighted vessel. Fighting against the endless line of combers rolling toward her from the southwest, the *Exceller* was pitching deeply and pounding. Heavy sprays rose in bursts above her bows and swept over her foredeck. Captain Switzer signalled the engine room for reduced speed. In mid-morning, they pumped five hundred tons of salt water ballast into her, forward; but even with this added

weight she continued to pitch heavily. The four life-rafts, two forward of the bridge, two aft, looking like enormous square packing-cases tilted on their slanted runways, alternately seemed to be lifted straight toward the depressed skies or to hang like suspended boulders over the deck as the ship rolled.

The lashings by which they hung could not long withstand this merciless jerking. At noon, the starboard after life-raft snapped its lashings and pitched downward over the rail and grazed No. 5 lifeboat as it fell, slightly damaging the boat. Drenched with rain, the seamen on deck watched its unwieldy black bulk rising and falling on the waves as it drifted off astern, and shook their heads gloomily.

The wind grew changeable during the night; and in the gray daylight, while a light rain fell, it veered prankishly from southwest to northeast, then sprang up from a new quarter, the southeast, after having leaped entirely around the compass. But it still continued to reach almost to gale force at times. The result was a confused sea, very rough, through which the vessel labored at reduced speed, pounding and pitching deeply, and taking heavy spray over her entire length. At 8 o'clock that night a second life-raft was carried away from its lashings. This one, the forward portside raft, a thing as big as a two-ton truck, was hurled like a child's toy to the deck and bent the ship's rail abreast No. 3 hatch like a hairpin. Almost at the same moment, an enormous wave raced up from behind the ship, rose, towered over her, and fell with staggering weight upon the afterdeck. It snapped a steel stanchion from its bolts, shattered the globe of the blue anchor-light, bent the shaft of the fog-buoy wire reel, and crippled the emergency wheel and the steering-gear stand. The wind, shrieking in triumph, tore away the canvas covers lashed over the topping-lift and the lift purchase and whirled them away into the darkness like gray rags which instantly vanished.

On the day following, although a rough southwest sea con-

tinued, and the ship still pounded and pitched deeply, the wind had shifted to the southwest and was steadier. In the afternoon, the crew was mustered to stations and held fire and boat drills. Rain squalls returned on the fifth day, with the wind from the north, and the vessel rolled heavily at times, taking sprays over her weather rail.

The sixth day was far worse. The wind, varying from northwest to southeast, again heaped up a confused sea, which, as the gale steadily increased in violence as the day wore on, became mountainous. By afternoon, the wind was howling in from northwest at whole gale force, and the barometer had fallen alarmingly. By 8 that night it was impossible to make progress against its terrific fury. With the wind dead ahead, the *Exceller* was hove to, attempting to ride out the storm on slow speed. She was laboring heavily. Tons of solid green water were coming over her forepeak, and heavy spray was sweeping her from bow to stern. An hour before midnight she rolled suddenly and sickeningly. Two men were hurled against iron doors and badly bruised. Home by Christmas? They would be lucky to get home at all!

The morning dawned, after the interminable night, on a sea that was still running to mountainous heights. Seas were shipped over the main deck, forty feet above the trough of the waves, and sprays ran ravenously over the whole length of the ship. Shortly after 6 in the morning, startled by a cry from someone, men looked up just in time to see, horrified, the grandfather of all seas rear its head high above the rail and then fall with a crash. It struck No. 4 lifeboat, a boat thirty feet long and weighing seven tons, tore it from its lashings and swept it over the side as if it had been a matchbox. Men stood looking after it helplessly as it whirled and tumbled astern. In that gale it was useless even to think of rescuing it.

The gale, still flattening every man to shelter, continued to wreak malicious damage. A small drawer in a chartroom cabinet, containing electrical equipment, shot out from the cabinet as if

propelled by springs and shattered its contents. The ship's name-board, bolted to the starboard side of the boatdeck, was ripped off by the fingers of the gale and smashed to bits. The medicine cabinet in the hospital bay was torn from its lashings and its contents spilled. Turnbuckles on the forestay and on No. 1 port boom were torn loose. Bunks were wrenched loose in the crew's quarters. Five steam radiators—two in the forward quarters of the gun crew, one in their quarters aft, and two in the steering engine room—were unshipped. Two enamelled surgical tables in the sick-bay were broken. On the afterdeck, the port icebox was wrenched from its lashing bolts and hurled against the port rail, damaging the rail. Metal covers of the hawse-pipes were torn off. In the forepeak storeroom, two pipe rod fittings for gear were sprung. The cross-battens at No. 5 hatch were bent. This was all child's play. There was also a crushing weight of water that bent the ship's rail, both port and starboard, near No. 3 and No. 5 hatches. And the heavy iron doors to fire-stations No. 7 and No. 8 were torn loose and carried away. Worst of all, by 10 in mid-morning, the vessel was taking a heavy pounding, shaking from the terrific blows of the seas from right and left that alternated like the blows of a boxer beating his opponent to his knees. At 10:28, the deck signalled to reduce speed. All through the rest of that morning and afternoon she was hove to, head to the wind, rolling to the merciless punches.

She gathered her strength. Late in the afternoon, she resumed her course.

But she was able to stagger ahead only hour by hour. Although the gale had moderated a little during the early hours of the night, it began to grow in intensity as midnight was reached. By early morning it was again blowing a full gale from the southwest. Day dawned over an insanely wild sea. The sky, overcast, with heavy rain squalls sweeping the ship at times, looked down upon a succession of dark mountainous ridges racing toward the struggling ship. The day had scarcely begun before it was neces-

sary once again to heave to, as if to give the ship time to catch her breath; and as she rose and fell with the gigantic combers, her head thrust into the wind, almost continuously the heavy bursts of spray curtained her and thundered like gunfire along the whole sweep of her decks.

High above her bows, each time she thrust her nose downward, there seemed to hang a vast curtain of white, stretching across the whole circle of the horizon. Beneath this curtain, a wall of dark green water, wide as a million Niagaras joined in one, rushed downward dizzily. The tossing white curtain was the crests of the combers; the down-rushing wall was their descending slope. Her bows lifted; the dark wall of water and the tumultuous whiteness above it dropped away from beneath her and vanished from sight, leaving her suspended for an eternity in nothingness.

She dropped. Again the bursts of stringing spray drove over her, driven by the gale to the velocity of rifle bullets. Men fought their way against it, clinging to a rail with one hand, while with the other arm they shielded their eyes against the hail of stinging pellets. The pitching decks were a No Man's Land. But the gun crews clung to their stations, drenched and shivering in the shrieking gale.

On the day following, at midday, though the ship was continuing to pitch and pound in the undiminished seas, spray flying over all, the required drills were held, as a matter of course. Grotesque in their lifebelts, the storm-tormented men managed to scramble to their fire-stations and to lead out fire hoses which the wind had transformed into writhing demons. The crews mustered at the lifeboats, panting. They answered to the roll-call, shouting their names against the shout of the wind, which whipped the names from their lips. The completion of the drills, in the face of a storm which was tossing them about without a moment's respite, amazed the men themselves. And they had gone through it all as smartly as if they had been upon a motion-

less sea. "Hot dog!" they told each other, exultantly. "We're still here!" And the captain, with equal satisfaction, noted grimly: "All equipment in good order."

They had been "taking it" for nine days without a rest. . . . Very well, they could continue to take it.

The gale continued, scarcely abating its fury, through the tenth day. The ship pitched so deeply at times that it seemed as if she could never rise. Captain Switzer, watching her gravely, ordered more weight of seawater to be pumped into her, to steady her. After that, there was not much more that could be done, except hold her to it . . .

The men, with eyes red-rimmed from lack of sleep, cheered up a little on the day following. The wind was no longer of gale force, strong as it still was, the *Exceller* shouldered through the sprays, her confidence returning. At the end of the day, spreading open the log book, Captain Switzer looked at the date. It stirred a vague feeling that it was associated with something in his life. Yes, he had it now! It was his birthday, his forty-fourth! Well, it hadn't been too bad a one. The gods of the weather had remembered it, even if he himself had not. With a faint smile, he noted upon the page: "Sea moderate. Partly cloudy, but with weather moderating through the day."

But the gods were mocking. The wind had lulled only to return next day with redoubled fury. By daylight, it was blowing from the southwest with almost gale force, and by midday it blew a whole gale, shrieking against her like all the devils of hell. The sea was a waste-land of spray-whitened mountains, rolling upon her unendingly. Shuddering, the *Exceller* rolled and pitched violently. By what miracle the men remained upon deck at all, buried as they were by continuous avalanches of heavy spray, no one knew. "It can't come any worse," they told themselves, groping for comfort. "It can't get worse, that's a cinch. It's bound to be better."

They were wrong. From a sea which that day had been la-

belled merely "very rough," the next day's seas heaped themselves to fantastic heights. Heavy rain squalls pattered on their crests. Steadily increasing in its incredible fury throughout the day, by late afternoon the wind had reached nearly hurricane force. The *Exceller* rolled and pitched more deeply than ever before, laboring pitifully and shaking like a leaf from stem to stern. Speed was reduced, to keep her from pounding herself too dangerously. Tons of green water thundered down again and again upon her bow, and spray enshrouded her decks continuously; but from each blow that crushed her to her knees, she staggered up again, unconquerable.

Just as daylight faded out entirely from the desolate sky, there rose against the faint light remaining in the west, an enormous comber, towering over the ship, topping the whole forward part of the vessel, shutting out the sky. It fell.

When it was at last possible to go forward and examine the fore part of the vessel, it was found that although the *Exceller* had escaped all damage to her body, she had strangely had her earrings shaken from her ears. No one could believe that such a thing was possible. And yet this was the manner of it:

These, earrings to a lady, were what a steamship calls "devil's claws." They weigh fifty pounds or more, and are of wrought steel, thicker than a man's wrist. When an anchor chain is dragged up and stowed inside the chain-locker in the forepeak, one of these huge devil's claws is hooked over the links of the mighty chain, so that there shall be no danger of its running out again through the hawse-pipes if the brake on the windlass should accidentally let go. Long before the *Exceller* had encountered the gale, one such devil-claw had been hooked over the starboard anchor chain, and another over the port anchor chain. All slack in the chains had then been taken up by a turnbuckle, until the chain and claw were gripped together as rigidly as if they formed one single piece of steel. Nothing short of an acetylene torch could ever separate them.

But that colossal wave, falling upon them, had done it. The force and weight of that mass of water, the jar which shook the vessel as it struck, had wrenched both devil's claws, both port and starboard, from the chains. Driven through the chain-pipes by the force of the falling water as if they had been hit by a giant sledgehammer, the steel claws cracked and tore away the cement with which the pipes were lined, opening them to a spout of seawater which instantly flooded the chain locker. On the steel floor of the forepeak, the flood was two feet deep. Dripping and leaking down, sea water drenched the electric wires of the ship's degaussing system, rendering it useless against mines.

But that was all. They hastily lashed down the anchor chains anew, and thanked their stars. The *Exceller* plodded on. She had outlived that one wave's murderous blow, but she was wary. There was a long way still to go . . .

Would she get home by Christmas? It began to be a doubt.

The thirteenth day of the voyage afforded little hope of that. The gale continued, the seas ran just as high, the oncoming combers continued to topple their tons of solid water upon her battered bows; and the *Exceller*, pitching deeply, dared not creep forward at more than a fraction of her speed, for fear of excessive pounding.

And they were closer, now, to the lurking-grounds of the enemy underseas. Perhaps they would never get home, at Christmas or at any other date . . . "Held fire and boat drills," read the decklog that night. "Crews mustered at fire-stations with lifebelts. Seven hoses led out and full pressure on same. Crews mustered at boats. All secure. All equipment in good order."

Men could do no less than be ready . . .

December the twentieth. "*Wind WNW, force 6. Sea rough. Overcast, with rain, turning to snow flurries. Vessel still at reduced speed, during early morning. Pitching deeply and pounding occasionally. Afternoon, snow flurries and low fog causing low visibility.*"

December the twenty-first. *"Wind lessening. Sea moderate. Cloudy, with snow. 1:10 PM, pilot boat coming alongside. 1:20 PM, pilot aboard. Proceeding at various speeds and courses. 5:41, lines ashore. 5:55 PM, finished with engines, moored. Voyage ends."*

Roof-tops ashore are white with snow. There are lights in the windows. It will be a white Christmas.

XII

SHUTTLE TO NORTH AFRICA

No JOLLIER man—nor more competent shipmaster—ever lived than Captain Gustav Berg, master of the *Exiria*. He was a huge man, more than six feet tall, and weighing more than two hundred pounds. In his broad weatherbeaten face his eyes twinkled with perpetual good humor. All men and all women were his friends. In from a voyage, he hobnobbed jovially with everyone, great or small, in the Company's offices. As he passed along from desk to desk, trailing good humor, smiles followed him. The girl typists, clerks, secretaries, all crowded around him. He greeted each one of them alike, hailing each one delightedly: "Ha, here's *my* girl!" Every one of them knew well that for twenty-five years he had had only one girl—his wife, Singne. But they loved it. They never even pretended to be shocked by his salty oaths, for they adored his language. His profanity was innocent. He was unconscious of it. The prissiest of old maids could not have been shocked by it. News of his arrival in port always spread through the offices like wildfire. His big, hearty, booming voice, chuckling, trailed from room to room, leaving the girls giggling in its wake. He made jokes about himself. "Loog at me!" he would roar happily, thumping his broad chest. "Fatter than I was, last time I was here! *Too* fat, fat as a gottam pig! Yoost a Swede squarehead!" And his laugh would boom out, making everyone laugh with him.

He might call himself "squarehead," in jest but no one

else would ever call Captain Gustav Berg that. He was profoundly respected. There was no more keen and capable a shipmaster among all the captains on the seven seas. He was fifty-seven years old. Born at Warberg, in Sweden, he had shipped on a small brig in the Baltic trade before he was seventeen. Two years later, he made his way to America and to a farm in Nebraska, owned by a cousin of his. There he worked for five years. Then, getting his citizenship papers, he joined the Navy. He never forgot his love for the farm. Thirty years later, after thirty years at sea, he still talked of "settling down" in Nebraska.

Leaving the Navy after eleven years, with the rank of warrant officer, he had served as a ship's officer in the merchant marine for twenty years. For the past fifteen years he had been in command of ships. For this Company he had commanded, in turn, the Exmoor, the Excello, the Exford and the Exmouth. These were all ships that were old in service. In June of 1940 a magnificent new ship, the Exemplar, was placed in commission; and Captain Berg was chosen to command her. He took her to India on two voyages. The next year, another new ship, the Express, sister to the Exemplar, was ready. The Exemplar had been transferred to British war service, and Captain Berg took command of the Express.* After two voyages to India, he was given command of the newest of the Company's ships, the Exiria, when she was commissioned, in February, 1942. In the space of three years he had commanded three of the newest and finest of all the ships in the Company's fleet.

On the Exiria's maiden voyage, bound for Bombay, and

* Returning from her second voyage to India, the Express was running down the east coast of Africa, one day northward of Durban, on the seventh of December, 1941. That night, Captain Berg turned on the radio in his quarters to catch the regular broadcast of American news from the wireless station at Bound Brook, New Jersey. A German voice was on the air. Suddenly, it broke off. In its stead, came a voice speaking in Swedish, the captain's native tongue. "The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor," it said. Captain Berg leaped from his bunk and notified his mates. "Sort of lucky I understood Swedish, wasn't it?" he would say when telling the story afterwards. "How could that fellow in Bound Brook know I knew Swedish?" He shook with laughter.

carrying munitions for China, the ship was not far to the south of Colombo, Ceylon, on Easter Sunday, when the Japanese fleet was bombing that city. Captain Berg picked up the news on the radio the following day—the same day on which the Japanese were shelling and sinking the Exmoor, near Madras. (He had been second mate of that ship, twenty years before.) The Exiria kept steadily on her course for Bombay. She had not yet reached her destination, when, three days later, the Japanese sank the British cruisers Dorsetshire and Cornwall and the aircraft carrier Hermes in the Indian Ocean, far to the east. Reaching Bombay, its harbor was found so crowded with vessels that had fled from eastern Indian ports to escape the Japanese that Captain Berg went on to Karachi to discharge his cargo. Returning to Bombay, he loaded ore and general cargo for the United States and brought it back safely.

After that, the Exiria made two trips to the British Isles with cargoes of war material. The swift, big, new ship romped through Atlantic dangers. Her massive captain gloated over her. Why should he not? Thirty years before, in his twenties, he had been a Navy bo's'n's-mate. Now he was commanding this sleek beauty; a ship to be proud of; no small thing, to be master of a ship like that . . . Going about his duties in the crowded British port, crowded with American naval officers, he found it wonderful to come upon, again and again, some Navy officer whom he had known long years before, on the other side of the world. "Why, sure, we were on China station together, on the old Pampanga, remember?" Remember the old gunboat, and the river, from Canton to Foochow? Who could forget! Or it might have been on the old Petrel, or the old Wheeling, putting in at ports all the world over—Hongkong, and Singapore, and Yokohama, or any of a hundred others. It was good. One day, a British Admiral, no less, invited him to tea, just for old time's sake; just the two of them, hobnobbing there. "You know it's gottam funny, Admiral, the first time a fellow gets a salute,"

the captain chuckled, balancing the teacup on his knee. "The first time I got one, I don't forget it. It was in the Philippines, at our Navy Station, at Cavite, back in '18. In April, and, my Gott, it was hot! I came up the walk, carrying my own seabags on each shoulder, and I was sweating, and I didn't have a hand free to wipe off the sweat with, and a sailor gives me a salute. Gottam it, I had to drop both bags off my shoulder to answer it! You see, they'd just made me a warrant officer that morning, and I wasn't used to it!"

No harm, to have a bit of a laugh, now and then. There wouldn't be much to laugh over, once you had got out to sea again. December was beginning. In North Africa, just four weeks before, the landing-barges had gone in, and men had been killed; and there would be blood still to come. There were supplies to be rushed there, still, ton after ton. Yankee ships that had discharged their cargoes for England must now load afresh for Africa; the stream of convoys must flow south without ceasing.

On the eleventh of December, two such convoys started simultaneously. In one of them was the *Exiria*. In the other was the *Exilona*, another of the Company's ships. She was commanded by Captain Ragnar Eklund, whose previous command, the *Exmoor*, had been sunk by the enemy in the Indian Ocean eight months before. He had got his men safe to shore and was back on the job, as a matter of course.

The *Exilona* was an old ship. She had been launched at Hog Island twenty-three years before, and she had made no less than sixty-two voyages in the service of the Company. But she was still on the job, and would be, as long as one rivet held. She was loaded to capacity, with supplies destined for Oran, and she would get them there. A stubborn old woman, the *Exilona*.

The British Naval Control ran these matters on a split-second timing. The *Exilona* took her departure at 5:43 that afternoon.

The Exiria's departure, from a point two hundred miles southward of the Exilona, was clocked at 5:50. Seven minutes apart . . .

Nevertheless, there are forces not in the hands of men. Wind and weather belabored the old Exilona, but spared the Exiria, though she was only two hundred miles away. Hardly more than a stiff breeze, force 3, passed over the Exiria; but when it reached the Exilona it had increased to force 6. The blunt-bowed old ship waddled along at only six knots for the first eighteen hours, rolling moderately. The wind was increasing in force steadily. By the next noon it was a whistling gale, risen to force 11, piling up mountainous seas and long heavy swells. The Exilona was rolling and pitching dangerously. There was a light fog, passing rain squalls, and very poor visibility. She fought the gale, head on, all day long. Shortly after nine o'clock that night the vessel shipped a huge sea, of terrific force, over the port rail. It tore a bulwark bracket loose, carried away two iron ladders on the port side, ladders which reached all the way from the well deck to the bridge. It smashed the wooden black-out screen along the midships alleyway. It stove in one of the lifeboats, damaged one of the life-rafts, and swept another life-raft away completely. Forward, the great wave tore loose two of the fifteen-ton Army trucks from their fastenings and shifted them like toy express-wagons. Sweeping aft, the solid water shifted the after deck load as well, tearing loose and washing overboard about five thousand pounds of boxed provisions destined for Africa. As its parting flick, it snapped off the steel docking telegraph post on the poop deck and carried away with it the blue stern-light as it went. The wind continued at hurricane force; the ship was steering with great difficulty; and in the pitchy darkness, on the crazily pitching deck, the whole crew worked like staggering madmen to restore order to the welter of cargo tossed about by the malevolent sea. It became impossible to force the old ship forward any longer, through the hurricane; Captain

Eklund brought her head around, and hove her to. Through the remainder of the long night, the storm continued. The gray morning came, but with it came no slackening of the wind's terrific violence. The Exilona took the brutal hammering of the seas upon her with a dazed stubbornness, while bursting sprays drenched her decks from bow to stern. Hour upon hour the weary crew struggled on, tossed like damned souls between sea and sky, until at last all the scattered deck-load and tangled gear had been made secure. This done, an attempt was made to bring the ship back to her place in the convoy; but in those mountainous seas it was impossible; the Exilona was forced to turn about and go back to port.

Captain Gustav Berg, with the new Exiria, was luckier. The convoy in which the Exiria sailed did not meet any such weather as this, during the same two days. The speed of the convoy had been fixed at under ten knots. The Exiria could do eighteen, without turning a hair. The first day's weather was fine and clear. Captain Berg locked within his capacious chest any feelings of impatience he might have had, and jogged dutifully along with the rest of the ships.

But on the second day the wind veered to a new quarter, leaped to violence, and brought dirty weather with it. Mountainous seas and a rough swell tossed the convoy. The Exiria rolled and pitched heavily, and Captain Berg heaved a sigh of relief. To continue poking along at nine knots would mean that his ship would take a merciless shaking. There were no orders to compel that unnecessary punishment. Chuckling, he told his radio operator to signal that he was unable to maintain convoy speed. The Exiria began to move faster. Captain Berg rubbed his hands together gleefully. In another hour or two the convoy had dropped out of sight, astern of him. The Exiria was "on her own," as he wanted her to be.

In spite of the buffeting headwind and the mountainous sea, she ran at twelve knots through each of the next twenty-four

hours. By noon of the next day she was a hundred sea miles ahead of the plodding convoy.

But the gale grew stronger and stronger. That day and the next it blew at full force. On its first night it carried away the starboard life-raft, forward; and a sea breaking over the bow swept overboard an ammunition ready-box containing twenty-five shells for the forward three-inch gun. On the second night another sea wrenched away a part of the rail, by No. 3 lifeboat. But none of these things disturbed the captain. What really annoyed him was that the infernal pitching and rolling of the ship put a complete stop to hot meals. Throughout those two days there wasn't so much as a single five-minute lull in which the ship's cook could keep a pot or a pan from flying around the galley. Captain Berg gloomily stoked his huge frame with cold vittles and thought even more wistfully than usual of his Singne's good Swedish cooking, back home in New Jersey. Standing watch for twenty-four hours a day was nothing, not even worth mentioning; but this conspiracy of wind and sea to keep a man from a decent dinner was diabolic.

But on the third day the gale began to wear itself out against this man. Sulkily, the wind and sea began to moderate. The barometer, which had once tumbled to 28.10, also gave it up as a bad job and climbed back to a more reasonable height. By seven o'clock in the evening, Captain Berg concluded that it would be safe to pick up speed once more. He rang down to the Chief, Leonardi, to push the engines up to ninety turns. They had been turning at seventy-five. The *Exiria* began, thankfully, to make knots . . .

In the worst of the storm, she had made only two hundred and forty miles in the day's run. Now, being given her head, she ran four hundred miles in the next twenty-four hours. On the day following, she ran four hundred and forty-three . . .

At this point, Captain Berg had a moment of uncertainty. The *Exiria* had shown her heels to the rest of the convoy. No

doubt of it, the other ships must be straggling five hundred miles behind her, by this time. He had arrived alone, off the Strait of Gibraltar. But what was he to do next? Go on in, alone, or hang around here in the submarine infested Atlantic, and wait for the rest of them to come up?

What at first sight appeared to be a couple of sea-gulls, winging out toward him from the direction of Gibraltar, put an end to his hesitancy. The sea-gulls turned out to be two British planes, scouting for just such arrivals. They signalled him to come on in.

The news of the Exiria's galloping run, ahead of her convoy, and through a storm that had scattered that convoy, seemed to tickle naval offices in England as well as in Gibraltar, within the next few minutes. The Exiria had hardly turned her nose toward the straits when the wireless in her radio-shack began picking up an impressive chattering in code from the Control. Captain Berg began to chuckle as he read. It was addressed to his own convoy, the convoy he had left behind him.

It was "for all stragglers from Convoy X, *except* the Exiria."

Certainly not for the Exiria! The Exiria at that moment was streaking into Gibraltar, five hundred miles ahead of the others. It was two days before they all came in, to find her waiting for them . . .

"The trouble with me," said Captain Berg solemnly, sitting down to a proper meal, "was that I am too gottam fat. I couldn't wait. I had to get somewhere, before I was starved."

They looked at him enviously. "Oh, is that so?" they asked. "You picked a good time to get away from the convoy. An hour after you went on, the subs found us. They torpedoed the transport that you had been next to. Ten to one, they'd have got you, too."

Captain Berg nodded. "I would not like that," he said. "To be in the water is not nice."

* * *

In due course the Exiria's cargo was discharged at Oran, still under air attack, and she made ready to return.

As the Exiria pulled away from her dock, the Exilona moved in and took the vacated berth. Turned back by the gale, two months before, she had tried again. *Her* cargo was delivered!

The Exiria went out of the Mediterranean and headed for England, traveling so fast that not even a wisp of smoke trailed from her stack. Two other American freighters, even bigger than she, started out with her. She ran away from them. One of them turned back. When the Exiria came into port, the other was still twenty-four hours behind her. She had been traveling at seventeen knots all the way. Tearing up the channel, she missed a floating mine by a scant five feet, an eyelash.

"Four days and a half out of Gibraltar," announced Captain Berg, beaming, as he came ashore. "What's been your hurry?" retorted the docking officer. "Oranges," chuckled the captain. "I've got seven hundred ton of oranges aboard, from Oran. You know tam well you want oranges. I couldn't let 'em spoil, could I?"

By the tenth of February he was back in New York. Besides cargo from England, he brought mail pouches. He had been gone four months, had brought the Exiria through ten thousand miles of danger-studded salt water. The girls in the office crowded around him as he came in. "Ha, there's *my* girl again!" he chuckled to each one of them in turn.

"Tell us, did you have any adventures, captain?" they begged him. Captain Berg shook his head solemnly. But there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Not a gottam one," he said.

He hurried home, home to Jersey. Singne was waiting, and a real dinner. There wouldn't be many days before he must take the Exiria out again.

* * *

Other ships belonging to the Company were equally invaluable in taking to North Africa the supplies needed by the American and British fighting men. The *Exceller*, reaching Algiers November 7, was the very first. The *Reverdy Johnson*, a new Liberty ship, arrived at Oran on the twelfth of November, commanded by Captain Nelson, who had brought her there by way of England. The *Examiner*, commanded by Captain Kuhne, undaunted by his shipwreck in the *Express*, crossed the Atlantic and began to unload her cargo at Casablanca on November 17. She was back at home by Christmas Eve, began immediately to take on another load, and reached Casablanca with it on January 22. The *Artemus Ward*, and the *Exanthia*, and the old *Expositor*, back from Russia, went in. The *Charles Carroll*, another Liberty ship, commanded by the veteran Captain Sawyer, had sailed by way of England, began to unload cargo at Arzeu on December 10, then moved over to Oran to finish discharging the remainder. The *Exchester*, under Captain Evans, after discharging a cargo in England late that October, was requisitioned by the British Ministry of War Transport and despatched from England to North Africa on December 11, departing in a gale which also lashed the old *Exilona* and the new *Exiria*. The *Exchester* docked at Oran on Christmas Day, not far from the *Charles Carroll*, which had reached that harbor a week before. While Captain Evans and Captain Sawyer were exchanging Christmas greetings under an African sun, Captain Kuhne and Captain Switzer were bringing their two ships into New York Bay. The ferry shuttled to North Africa without a pause.

And by the first of December, when only three weeks had passed since the first landings on the African coasts had begun, a new war-time responsibility was suddenly added to those already resting upon the Company.

Its ships had already been taking lend-lease goods to Russia and India, and in the Indian cargoes were lend-lease goods for China. Now, with the ports of Morocco and Algiers opened, the

shipping of lend-lease goods to North Africa could commence; and cargo space must be found for them as well as for the continuing flood of military supplies that must reach North Africa.

It wasn't the captains, and the engineers, and the crews, alone, that did it. It was the men and women in the offices, working early and long. It was Bill Dausey and Johnny Mueller, and "Ty" Newman, and, perhaps most of all, Charley Kinney, the Company's auditor, along with John MacGowan and Lew Hart, and a hundred others, who sweated and grinned and sweated some more, and knew in their bones that it is ships that make America . . . It was the young men who pored over the endless items of the manifests, and the girls who made the machines clatter all day long like machine-guns firing at the enemy planes diving at a cargo-ship. And that sound was not less important, in its way, than the rattle of the machine-guns, either—for this was all part of the business of getting the guns and the tanks and the help, in the shape of lend-lease, to the Allies . . . They did it with an office staff in whose ranks of younger men the Army draft had shot gaping holes. One man in four was called into the Armed Services. And still the office carried on, although this tremendous burden of added work was thrust upon it. Tanner, the personnel manager, nearly doubled the staff of women employees. The men who were left toiled over the manifests. Some of them spent more than eighty hours a week on the job . . . The manifests had to be completed before the convoy went out. A convoy must not be delayed . . .

They didn't brag about what they were doing. Sometimes the girls at the desks glanced out of the windows that look down on the river and the bay and saw the gray ships with the thin guns forward and aft going slowly out past the Statue with the lifted torch. And they could be proud.

It might not be one of the Company's ships, and yet in a sense it was theirs . . .

XIII

"COURAGE, EFFICIENCY AND RESOLUTION"

THE SHIP Zebulon B. Vance followed her voyage to Murmansk by taking a cargo to England. Her master, Captain Guy Hudgins, having completed the discharging of this cargo, was preparing to take her back across the Atlantic, when, to his mystification, he was notified late in September that he was to act henceforth on orders from the British Admiralty.

Under these orders, a month was spent in taking on a cargo whose ominous nature merely increased his conviction that the ship was headed for action—somewhere. This cargo consisted of American army tanks, American army trucks, bristling with guns, tons of ammunition, and, as a part of the deck load, two huge landing-barges, motored, weighing twenty-odd tons each, which could be lifted only by jumbo booms.

On the seventeenth of October, two British naval officers and a British navy gun crew of seven men, together with a detachment of sixty American soldiers, technical corps men, trooped aboard. On the same day, the captain was notified that he must allow none of his crew to go ashore on leave. Three days later, not a man on board having left the ship in the meantime, he was notified to proceed to sea, where, at a specified rendezvous, he would receive orders as to the ship's destination.

All this, and especially the cargo, certainly pointed to an invasion raid, somewhere; but that raid, so far as Captain Hudgins might guess, might be anywhere between the north pole and the south.

On the twenty-second of October, arriving and anchoring at the rendezvous, Captain Hudgins saw his ship surrounded by sixty others. Warships shepherded them. Among them was the new American aircraft-carrier, the Avenger. It was going to be quite a party—somewhere.

But he was not to remain in mystification much longer. Signals fluttered from the Avenger; and soon the Navy launches darted from ship to ship, bringing their captains to the conference to which the Avenger had summoned them.

Captain Hudgins stared at the carrier with lively curiosity as the launch brought him to her companion-ladder. She was the first of the many "C-3" ships which were to be rushed from American shipyards. Inch for inch, in length, her steel hull was almost exactly that of his own ship, the Zebulon Vance. But the Vance was a blunt-nosed Liberty ship; and the blueprints for the "C-3" type of freighters, sharper bowed and much swifter than the Liberty ships, had been easy to convert so that the "C-3's" already begun could swiftly be made into plane-carriers and used for the protection of the convoys. The Avenger wasn't a big ship; but as the launch drew up alongside and he glanced up at her towering hull and the broad "flat-top" on which the deadly planes were already assembled, he felt a glow of pride. The Vance herself could put up a good scrap, as he knew; but here was her scrappier sister, who could let loose a cloud of stinging hornets . . .

One by one, the sixty captains crowded into the Avenger's wardroom. There was a hush. All eyes were turned upon the silent group of British naval officers who alone knew the secret of their destination. A grave voice broke the silence:

"Gentlemen, we are joined here to engage in a hazardous operation of supreme importance to our countries. This is the invasion of North Africa."

* * *

That night they were steaming southward.

Captain Hudgins, back on his own bridge, reflected on what he had heard in that profoundly impressive meeting. The invasion was to strike from two quarters, England and America, simultaneously. The armada from America was to attack the Atlantic beaches of Morocco. That would be one hundred per cent a Yankee show. The other, of which he was a part, would include American ships and American troops, but the Royal Navy would handle the whole job in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean was their particular pond. This convoy—and it wasn't the only one, convoy after convoy was to follow at their heels—would swing eastward through the Gibraltar strait and strike at Oran and Algiers. His ship, the *Vance*, and forty others, would land their barges and guns at the beaches of Arzeu, a dozen miles to the east of Oran. They had got their instructions plain, at that meeting, down to the last detail. Admiral Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham headed the whole business. Rear Admiral Arthur Lumley St. George Lyster commanded the aircraft carriers that would cover all the Mediterranean landings. Rear Admiral Sir Martin Burrough and Vice-Admiral Sir Frederick Edward Collins commanded the warships and would direct their participation in the Mediterranean landings. But of all the British seadogs present at that meeting on the *Avenger*, Captain Hudgins most remembered Commodore Troubridge; for it was Commodore Troubridge who was to be directly in charge of the landings at Arzeu, and it was Commodore Troubridge himself who had spread the plan before them there.

The time-table ran smoothly. So nicely had the convoy's speed been calculated that, deliberately taking eighteen days for the voyage, they arrived off the entrance to the Mediterranean at noon of November 6. Only their own planes, none of the enemy's, saw them come in. As they were not due at Oran before midnight of the next day, and less than one hundred and fifty miles remained to be covered, they slowed down, killing time. As they

passed Gibraltar another convoy from England caught up with them, a lordly sight, with its big troop transports and its accompanying flotilla of motor launches and tremendous barges. This was the convoy in which the *Exceller* was included. At nightfall, the vessels bound for Algiers speeded up and drew away from the rest. The night was very black, the weather clear. An hour after midnight, exactly upon schedule, the *Zebulon Vance* and the others reached their appointed anchorage off Arzeu.

Every man on board who was to take part in unloading the barges and the fighting gear for the battle that was about to break loose was already at his assigned station, tensely waiting. Even before the *Vance's* anchor touched the sand, in fourteen fathoms of water, they had jumped to the work. On the forward deck, close to No. 2 hatch, lay the clumsy twenty-ton bulk of one of the motored barges. It would be the first thing to be put off. Above it towered the sturdy foremast, with its steel boom, designed to lift not twenty but thirty tons. Harisanoff, first mate of the *Vance*, saw to it that everything was in readiness. At the two big winches beside the hatch the boatswain and a seaman stood ready. A half dozen British Navy seamen, led by a sub-lieutenant, took their places in the barge. They were to be lowered with the barge, to handle it as soon as it touched the water. The mate gave the word. The winches rumbled, the steel cables tightened, the big barge rose from the deck, and was swung outward over the ship's rail. Not twenty minutes had passed since the ship anchored.

The senior British naval officer aboard, Lieutenant-Commander Bell, R.N.R., watched, well pleased. Everything was going well.

The hollow steel boom from which the huge landing-barge hung suspended over the water was sixty-three feet long, shaped like an enormous cigar. Its own weight was five thousand pounds. The men below it looked up at it in perfect confidence.

Without the slightest warning the giant cylinder of steel bent

in the middle, then snapped off short, eight feet from its inboard end.

Two tons of falling steel missed the group of men on the deck by inches and smashed the two monster steel winches as if they had been sardine tins.

The barge, with the men in it, fell clear of the rail and dropped fifteen feet to the water. Its tiller-box and propellers were damaged, but, miraculously, it remained afloat. Five of the seven men aboard it were catapulted from the barge as it struck the water. The sub-lieutenant, Helps, getting his head above water, saw one of the seamen struggling to keep himself afloat. He swam to the man and supported him.

From the ship, help was already on the way. A lifeboat had been lowered instantly. Nick Smar, the second mate, officered it. The men were rescued. Only one was found to be seriously injured.

With daylight, the discharging of cargo from the after holds was begun. A smaller barge, an LCT, was lowered without mishap, but misfortune returned after the barge had been floated. A heavy swell drove it violently against the ship's side, denting the plates. Not until the second day following was it possible to lift the second of the two big barges. The jumbo boom being broken, and the winches smashed beyond repair, it was necessary to maneuver the Vance alongside another vessel, equipped with a sufficiently powerful boom. A rising swell bumped the two ships against each other during the operation, causing some additional damage. But worse was to come.

After the big barge had been placed in the water, the five-ton American army trucks in No. 5 hold were lifted down into it, one by one. This was begun early in the evening of November 12. At 11 o'clock, after the work had been going on for five hours, one of the two hatch booms suddenly snapped. As it fell, its rigging struck an American soldier who was working beside the open hatch. He was hurled downward into the hold and died of his

injuries. Another soldier was instantly killed by the truck, which dropped into the barge, pinning him under it. Two others were injured.

The Vance went grimly on with her job. Moving toward the docks which by now had been captured, picking her way through between ships and barges that cluttered the roadstead until it looked like Times Square on an election night, she was bumped into by a gasoline barge. Nothing caught fire. . . . After she had docked, a British transport edged in alongside her, stepping on her toes. The propeller tip was bent a bit, nothing serious. . . . In two days more, all the Vance's cargo was discharged. She breathed more easily.

There had been gunfire, from the warships and from the shore, from the very beginning, but Captain Hudgins had been too busy to pay much attention to it. The shore batteries at the little village of Mastaganem, east of Arzeu, had been firing away at the warships all day long, until an American destroyer went close inshore and silenced them. Captain Hudgins had seen a plane hedgehopping along the beaches and firing at the Yanks who were landing from the invasion barges, but the only blood he had seen was that on his own ship. . . . When some of the soldiers whom he had brought across the Atlantic went over to Oran in a jeep, they invited him to come along. They passed through a village whose house-walls were pocked with bullet holes. The road was littered with dead horses and the smouldering wrecks of French army trucks. But when he got to Oran, which had been taken at the cost of more than a little blood, he found its people rejoicing that they were no longer under an enemy's domination. In the long years of peace, he had docked his ship in Oran harbor on many a voyage. People remembered him. At the old ship-chandlery, Naus's, the manager's face was beaming. "Get this war over with, captain!" he cried. "Come back and see us, the sooner the better!"

Before the Zebulon B. Vance pulled out from Arzeu, a letter

came aboard. It was addressed to the ship herself. Captain Hudgins looked at it, and a pleased grin spread over his face. It was signed by the British Admiral who had commanded the whole of the business in the Mediterranean.

"I thank Captains, Officers and Men alike," it read, "for the courage, efficiency and resolution with which they played their part . . . in this hazardous operation of supreme importance to our countries . . ."

Signed: Andrew Cunningham, Admiral.

Captain Hudgins read the whole thing over again, pondering. "Courage, efficiency and resolution." That's what it said. Well, these Englishmen ought to know. God knew, *they* had been showing plenty of all three. And if *they* said so—

He held the letter out to the mate. "Here, Nick," he said. "Take a gander at this."

He rubbed his fingers thoughtfully over his chin.

"Did I ever tell you, Nick," he said, "that about twenty years ago I thought I'd had enough of going to sea?"

"No," said the mate, "you never told me."

"Well, I did," said the captain. "I signed off for good. There was a fellow over in Jersey had a little lunch-wagon business, and I bought him out. I tried it for a couple of years. I lost my shirt. So I came back to the Company. It's okay with me. I'm sort of glad I did."

The mate nodded, understanding. Captain Hudgins folded the letter from the Admiral carefully and tucked it away in his papers.

"You know what I'm going to do?" he demanded. "If we ever get through with this job without being blown to hell I'm going to stick this up where the boys can read it."

* * *

He took the ship back to England, got the two broken booms replaced, took on a fresh cargo of assorted hellfire for the Axis,

and carried it back to North Africa. Two hours after the Vance had moored alongside the dock at Oran, the air-raid alarm sounded. It was the twentieth of January, and two whole months had gone by since the occupation of Oran; but the enemy was still making things occasionally unpleasant. Now the night sky was suddenly pierced with the searchlights, and the fury of the ack-ack guns was enough to shatter a man's eardrums, as the German planes came over.

There was a crash on the foredeck of the Vance. Below, in the engine room, men heard it. "Good God!" muttered an oiler. "That bomb got us!"

But it wasn't a bomb. It was just that a steel bullet from an anti-aircraft gun had sliced through the wire cable, seven-eighths of an inch thick, supporting the No. 1 port boom, a cable that could lift five tons. The long boom toppled, struck the bulwark, and broke in two.

They began again to unload the cargo, as soon as the planes had gone. They finished the job.

XIV

"THE FEW, VERY CHOICE, TACITURN—"

THE DAY came at last. The captains of the ships making up the convoy assembled on shore, in the little Scottish seaport, to receive their final instructions from the commander of the British naval force which was to escort the convoy. Captain James Walden, master of the *Executive*, took his seat with the others. To him, the fact that the *Executive* was actually to depart for Russia the next day was almost unbelievable. The *Executive* had been in British waters for no less than seven long months. For twenty-eight weeks he had been awaiting orders for her to sail for Murmansk. He had left New York, with his cargo for Russia, on the eighteenth of April. He had arrived in Scotland on the tenth of May. Then the interminable waiting had begun. Again and again the *Executive* was shifted from one port on the coast of Scotland to another, and each time hope had sprung up in his heart that she would now be ordered on. Each time the hope died out. Daily, for two hundred days, he had called the British naval control, and daily he had been answered, "No, nothing yet." It was as though he were caught in some nightmare web, from which he could never escape. The men of his crew grew jittery. The repeated news of sinkings on the way to Russia did their nerves no good. Some of them fell sick, and had to be replaced. And still there came no orders to sail. The men snarled. "For God's sake, let's get on!" And still the days dragged on.

Captain Walden tightened his lips and asked no questions. It was not the business of a ship-captain to ask questions. He, no more than his men, was never informed of the reasons for the interminable delays. Only the remote and all-seeing central authority known as "London" could know the answers. Perhaps part of the delay had been caused by lack of sufficient dock facilities for the innumerable ships that came and went. Perhaps departure had sometimes been postponed because of the discovery that enemy spies had sent out word of the impending departure. Perhaps Russia had been petitioned to release the ships freighted with cargo for her, so that they might be used to take troops and guns and tanks and planes to North Africa. But until the eighth of November no shipmaster still in England knew that the North African invasion was under way. The whole seven months of delay, no matter how good the reasons for it, remained a mystery. "London" knew, and that was enough.

But all that was over now, on this twenty-first day of December. In the convoy conference room, Captain Walden took his seat with relief, knowing that now, at long last, he could "get on with it."

Captain James Walden had been born in Paltamo, an inland town in Finland, fifty years before, and had gone to sea when he was eighteen. He had taken out papers as an American citizen when still a young man, and had been with the American Export line for twenty years. He was of medium height, broad shouldered, smooth shaven, youthful of appearance, with jet black hair brushed back smoothly from his wide forehead. He dressed with neatness, and had the quiet manners of an experienced shipmaster.

He listened with profound attention to the few sentences addressed to the ship-captains by the British naval officer who was to command the convoy's escort. Captain Walden nursed a long-continued admiration for British naval officers. As a youngster, in the first World War, while sailing in convoy across

the Indian Ocean, he had been thrilled by the manner in which the Australian cruiser, H. M. S. Sydney, had caught the German raider Emden off the Cocos Islands and put an end to her. That fight, in saving the convoy, had saved him.

The officer speaking was a tall, dark, gray-haired man. Captain Walden considered him handsome. This was Commodore R. St. V. Sherbrooke, R.N.

"Make no mistake about it, gentlemen," Commodore Sherbrooke said quietly. "We may encounter nothing, or anything. But whatever comes, we will be with you, and will fight with everything we've got, to protect you. That is all."

* * *

They went out the next day, bound for Murmansk. The gray wintry seas were heaped up by an icy wind from the Arctic. Christmas Day was stormy, and the Executive rolled in a heavy sea. The ship's routine went on as usual. "So this is Christmas," observed one of the younger officers, noticing the date. Captain Walden smiled, and said nothing. He had not known a holiday in thirty years at sea.

The gale, from northwesterly, increased in violence during the next three days. Off Jan Mayen's Land, the storm had grown so bad that several of the convoy were obliged to heave to, and permit the rest to go on without them. Before daybreak on the morning of the twenty-eighth of December, Captain Walden found his own ship being dangerously tossed by the seas hammering her from the northwest. He flashed a message by blinker to the escort warship nearest him.

"Vessel rolling heavily," it read. "Some of my lifeboats working loose and planes in deck cargo may be carried away. Advisable to heave to."

Permission was given him, and he swung the ship's nose into the oncoming seas and kept it there for hours, while the crew tightened the lashings of boats and cargo. Torrents of green water

and white spray swept the ship from end to end. But before the day was over Captain Walden ordered the ship back on her course. When the next day came, he was able to increase her speed somewhat. On the second night, a blue star winked in the Arctic night, close to the black seas. It flashed, winked, flashed, winked. He thumbed the convoy's secret codebook. It wasn't a star, it was the signalling of the escort. The Executive answered, identifying herself, and was told to resume her place in the convoy. It was an order impossible to obey without forcing her to her limit. In leaving Scotland, the Executive had been sent to sea without a preliminary overhauling in drydock. The long weeks at anchor had coated her hull with barnacles, and, try as she might, she could not at first better nine knots. This was sufficient to enable her to trail behind the column, which was proceeding at nine knots, but not to speed up sufficiently to resume her former place. Not until early the next morning, the morning of December 31, did she manage to do so.

It was just in time. At nine o'clock that morning, enemy surface warships which had put out from their bases in Norway, sighted the convoy from astern; the first warning of their presence came with the sound of heavy firing in the rear of the convoy.

The British naval vessels went into action immediately, ordering the merchant vessels to continue on their course at utmost speed and to make emergency turns to avoid the enemy shellfire. The destroyers began at once to lay a heavy smoke screen to hide the convoy from the enemy. A running battle was fought all through that day, with the enemy constantly seeking to get past the fighters who lay between them and their prey. All that day the protecting screen of smoke was laid across the convoy's rear and flanks, one screen after another, as each drifted away. And still the enemy shells broke over the screen. Some of them seemed to be from eight-inch or ten-inch guns, betokening the presence of a German cruiser among the others. But, luckily, only one ship in the convoy was touched, and that not fatally.

The hit damaged her rudder, and she later dropped out of the convoy, but succeeded in reaching Murmansk by herself. Again and again the enemy destroyers tried to dodge through the line of British destroyers, but each time they were intercepted and turned back. A shell exploded no more than a ship's length from the Executive, throwing a ruddy glow over the ship as it burst. Captain Walden, with all his attention concentrated on directing his ship, never turned his head. But he saw one of the British destroyers, hit by a half dozen shells at once, go down in flame and smoke. Another destroyer instantly took her place and renewed the smoke screen hiding the convoy. The gunfire continued all that day. The Arctic night shut down at last, gray and cloudy. Late in the evening the convoy was at last able to pull itself away from the battle, the gunfire dropping farther and farther away astern, until at midnight it was a muttering only faintly heard.

On the next day, New Year's Day, the scattered ships re-formed themselves in line; and while they were doing so the escort vessels that had protected them so well raced up and rejoined them. The enemy had been driven off; but at a cost. Early in the battle, the convoy learned, a shell had struck the British vessel on which Commodore Sherbrooke was directing the fight. Twenty men were killed, and he had lost an eye, it was said; but he had remained at his post, refusing to leave it, throughout the battle. England gave him the Victoria Cross. "Whatever comes, we will be with you," he had said. He had kept that promise.

They sighted the coast of the Kola Peninsula next day, a little to the east of Murmansk. Here Russian naval vessels joined them, and the convoy was split, the Russians escorting some of the cargo ships into Archangel, the others into Murmansk. The Executive, with this division, headed for Murmansk.

They arrived off Kola Inlet that evening, under weather conditions that were as dangerous to a ship as the attack by the enemy squadron had been. The visibility was poor, and the

snow-covered coastline blended with the sky so that it was impossible to tell where the sea ended and land began. There was, moreover, a strong current setting in toward land. One of the ships, scarcely three cable-lengths ahead of the convoy commodore's ship, which was closely followed by the Executive, ran aground on Kildin Island and became a total loss. The commodore's ship and the Executive made emergency turns and, followed by the rest of the convoy, escaped similar disaster by a hair's breadth. As they felt their way along the coast, the "enemy aircraft approaching" warning was sounded. But the German planes did not appear. Soon a heavy fog set in, as the ships neared Kola Inlet. They reached the entrance to the inlet that night; and here the Russian escort left them. The fog was still too dense to proceed without guidance. Captain Walden got his ship close enough to the Russians, before losing sight of them altogether, to catch their final message—"No pilot now available. Wait till morning." In the dense fog he and the rest of the convoy cruised about cautiously, until, at morning, the fog thinned. They then ventured inward inch by inch until they picked up the pilot who was to guide them on up the river, and anchored five miles from Murmansk, that night, to await their turn at the crowded discharging docks.

The wait lasted three weeks. During these weeks, the town and the shipping was frequently raided by enemy planes. In one of these raids, a British tanker lying close astern of the Executive, was hit, the bomb killing five of the tanker's crew.

On the twenty-fourth of January the Executive was told to proceed to the unloading berth. She had scarcely moored there when the enemy planes came over and dropped bombs along the waterfront and the anchored shipping. From that day on, throughout her discharging and reloading, the air-raid alarms and attacks were numerous, particularly in clear weather and on moonlight nights. Days marked by snowstorms or by fog alone provided welcome relief. The Executive's naval gun crew

of twenty-four men were always at their guns. That had been one of the good results of the long delay in Scotland—the ship had been equipped there with Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns and two .50-calibre machine-guns. During daylight hours two Russian anti-aircraft gunners were stationed on the ship to aid the crew in distinguishing the enemy planes from Russian planes and to direct the fire. The men learned to distinguish the high-pitched sound of the Russian planes from the low drone of the German bombers. There was need for this constant alert—the nearest enemy base in Finland was only forty miles away, and its planes would be over Murmansk in less than ten minutes from the time they took off. The countless seabirds passing over the harbor—seagulls, ducks, and wild geese—added to the worries of the gun crews. A distant column of wild geese, their wings apparently motionless, looked precisely like a massed squadron of bombers.

On clear days, German reconnaissance planes would come over to take photographs of the shipping and the docks; and on calm days, when no wind was stirring, the speedy scout planes would dash in, draw a circle of white smoke above an anchored ship, then speed away. After it, before the smoke ring could drift away, would come the bombing plane, which had merely to drop its bomb through the ring and be sure of finding its target. Captain Walden, watching the maneuver through his binoculars one day, saw a Junkers-88 draw its smoke ring above a half circle of ships. After it came a Messerschmitt 109, skimming so low over the hills that the Russian anti-aircraft batteries could not fire upon it for fear of hitting the town itself. Captain Walden could read the figures upon the wings of the two planes clearly. But even while he watched the oncoming Messerschmitt a wind sprang up and blew away the smoke ring drawn by the Junkers. The bomber pulled away, balked of its target.

Two bombs straddled the Executive. One struck the dock, just beyond her bow. The other fell between her stern and the

bow of the next ship in line. Captain Walden, sighing in relief, took it as a good omen. "If we can be as lucky as this," he told himself, "we will always be lucky."

There was a vicious raid that night, with hits scored upon the town, the docks, and upon one or two ships, but after that came a lull of three days, caused by a heavy snowstorm. When the weather cleared again, the roofs of the town were deep laden with snow. At night, looking from the deck at the lights of the town and the cargo lights shining upon the snow-covered docks where the stevedores worked unceasingly, Captain Walden was reminded of the long-forgotten Christmases of his own boyhood. He thought of his old mother, and of his brother, whom he had not seen for years, still in Finland. Lights in the windows of houses roofed in snow . . . "It looks good," Captain Walden murmured to himself.

Her cargo discharged and a new cargo loaded for the return voyage, the Executive was shifted to an anchorage several miles down the river, to await the assembling of the home-bound convoy. Three weeks went by before the convoy was made up. In this time, air raids were a daily occurrence. But only once did they cause any damage. This was the work of a single bomber, which dived suddenly from the clouds and dropped a bomb in the No. 2 hold of a British freighter lying next to the Executive. Her cargo, of cotton and timber, burst into such violent flames that the crew were ordered to the boats at once. But a Russian naval fireboat came up, battled the fire for twenty hours, and saved the ship. Thereafter, although the German planes came over every morning, regularly, between 8 and 8:30, they dropped their bombs hastily, never scoring a hit, and fled before the guns of the ships and the onslaught of Russian fighter planes.

On the first of March, the convoy, consisting of over twenty ships, sailed for England, escorted by a British cruiser and a strong flotilla of destroyers and corvettes. Russian planes had

patrolled the sky all that day, before the convoy set out, and had reported that no German planes were sighted. But that the Germans would discover the convoy eventually was inevitable. The convoy steamed through the first twenty-four hours without attack, but on the second night the German submarine pack intercepted them. The escorting destroyers sent up flares that lit up the sea and the night was filled with the roar of the depth bombs. All through the following day, the third of March, the lively hunt for the undersea boats continued, and hundreds of depth charges were dropped around the convoy. On the fourth of March, the convoy encountered fields of pack ice and drifting pancake ice. The ice gave them a respite from the submarines, but all that day the ships turned and twisted to avoid collision with the drifting floes.

The Executive came safely through that night. She was doomed never to see another.

At daylight, at about eight o'clock, on the morning of March fifth, the sky was overcast, with few openings between the clouds, but the visibility was fairly good. Captain Walden, walking with his customary alert step upon the flying bridge, above the wheelhouse, thoughtfully rubbed his left elbow as he scanned the sky. The elbow did not hurt him. The gesture was one of long habit. Several years before he had had the misfortune to fall and break off an inch of bone just above that elbow. A little more than a year ago, while returning from India in command of another of the company's ships, the *Expositor*, they had encountered heavy weather north of Trinidad. He had been thrown from his feet, and had fallen on the same elbow. By the time they reached Boston, the arm was in such shape that an amputation was advised. But at New York the Company's medical director, Dr. Kimball, decided against the amputation and performed an operation which saved the arm. The *Expositor* was ready for sea before Captain Walden could leave the hospital. She sailed, with Captain Klepper as master, and when Captain

Walden reported for duty he was given the Executive to take out. Fleetinglly wondering where the Expositor, his old command, might be now, he rubbed his elbow and smiled.

Signals suddenly appeared on the commodore's vessel, leading the convoy. The hoise of flags and the blinker code spelled the sudden warning: "Hostile aircraft."

Two planes appeared. They came low, but kept miles distance, out of gun range, one of them circling back and forth to starboard of the convoy, the other keeping pace with it to port. They were beckoning submarines to the kill.

On every ship in the convoy the guns had instantly been manned, but for half an hour nothing happened. At twenty past nine, the convoy command signalled sharply, "Expect enemy attack."

Eight minutes later, those on board the Executive sighted the foaming track of a torpedo approaching the vessel from starboard. It shot across the ship's bows, barely missing her. The Executive's machine-guns had burst into action at the moment it was sighted, and kept up their fire as it passed, in the hope that the tracer bullet would warn the other vessels of its course.

They were still firing at it when the second torpedo struck. It struck with terrific force, on her starboard side, aft of the engine room. The shattering explosion followed instantly, tearing the dynamos and the main engines into fragments.

The Executive heeled to port, rolled backward, and shook from end to end. Captain Walden was thrown off his feet and fell across the edge of the flying-bridge deck, head downward, plunging toward the steel deck eight feet below. But as he fell, his outstretched arm—his right arm, not his left—hooked itself around the rail of the ladder leading to the bridge deck. The jerk almost tore the arm from its roots. But it whirled him, his feet swung out over the edge, and, instead of pitching forward upon his head, he dropped feet first.

To reach the steam-whistle handle on the side of the wheel-

house was, in time of accident, so much a matter of subconscious prompting, that it might be said that Captain Walden thought of it even as he was falling. As he touched the deck he began running towards it. But as soon as his fingers closed upon it he knew that everything was over. It was dead, there was no steam, nothing left to move the ship or even to steer her. The unanswering lever told him brutally that the ship was dead.

Men, the wheelman and the signalman from the wheelhouse, the crew of the guns mounted on the bridge, began running past him on their way to their boat stations. McAlister, his chief mate, a young fellow of twenty-five, burst out of the wheelhouse.

He asked, unemotionally, "Shall we get everybody to the boats and begin to lower, sir?"

Captain Walden answered unhesitatingly. With the knowledge that all mechanical power on the ship was quenched, there had instantly flashed through his mind the realization that nothing could be done to save her.

"Yes, go ahead," he said. "See that the boats are swung out. Then stand by for abandoning."

He motioned to the other young officer on the bridge watch, Francis Lynch, the third mate, of the same age as McAlister.

"You, too, Frank," he said. "Go along to the boat deck!"

And as Lynch ran down the ladder, the captain called down to him a word of encouragement.

"Take it easy!" he shouted. "Use your head, she isn't going down immediately. Good luck to you!"

The youngster looked back and smiled. "Aye, aye, sir!" he shouted cheerfully.

Captain Walden himself, accompanied by the Executive's chief engineer, Harry Heeman, ran across the deck and along the alleyways, peering into each of the living-quarters, both amidships and aft, to make sure that no one had been caught there. They saw no one. They looked down into the chaos of the engine room. Water was pouring in, and was already half-way up

the ladder. Its weight was listing the ship to starboard. There was no sign of the three men who had been there, and who must undoubtedly have been instantly killed by the explosion—Eisenberg, the third assistant engineer; Sorenson, an oiler, and Boulmer, a water-tender—and their mangled bodies were already submerged. Captain Walden told the chief engineer to go to the lifeboats.

On his way back, the captain noted as he ran the burly figure of MacField, a Negro from Jamaica, an experienced seaman, coolly watching the scene.

"You'd better go to your boat, Mac," he flung at the man, as he passed him. "But if you want to help me launch the starboard life raft, forward, you can give me a hand with it."

"No use, cap'n," said the Negro quietly. "I already tried it. One of 'em is launched, the other three are jammed and stuck."

"All right, then, go to No. 1 boat," the captain said, and ran on toward the bridge.

Below him, on the boat-deck, they had begun to lower the boats, beginning with No. 2 boat.

Captain Walden, alone on the bridge, hunted for the signal flags, found them, and hoisted them. "Torpedoed, abandoning ship," the flags told the rest of the convoy.

When he had run the hoist up and belayed the halliards, he looked down from the bridge-deck rail at the boats below. As No. 2 boat was being lowered, full of men, its forward davit carried away and fell upon the men, killing two of them—Capone, one of the gun crew, and "Johnnie" Walker, a Negro seaman. Thrown from the overturned boat, the rest floundered in the water.

Captain Walden yelled down to the mate.

"Are you sure there's no one left on the lower deck?" he shouted.

McAlister looked up. "Yes," he shouted back. "They're all out, captain!"

But the captain was not satisfied. He ran through all the cabins, the messroom, even flung open the pantry door, and searched through all the lower deck. Convinced that no one was left, he ran to the boat-deck and shouted to the chief engineer and the mate to lower away.

No. 4 boat was the first to pull away from the sinking ship, with five of the crew and five of the Navy gun crew at its oars. Having been launched just astern of No. 2 boat, which had overturned, they were able to pull the first-assistant engineer, Meyer, into the boat when he was thrown from No. 2 boat into the icy water. Reynolds, a seaman who had been signed on in Scotland, was another of the crew of No. 2 boat that had narrowly escaped death. He had been standing at the falls when the davit carried away, and, although the flying rope burned through his fingers to the bone, he had not been tangled in the length of rope which had been coiled at his feet and which flew past him into the sea.

No. 3 boat, commanded by the mate, with twenty-four men in it, was the next to pull away. Last to go was No. 1 life-boat, with Captain Walden in command, with twenty men. By this time the ship's stern was down, the after well-deck was level with the sea, and the sea water was pouring into the crew's quarters aft.

They looked around them. The main body of the convoy and its escorting ships had gone by; but three vessels were steaming toward them, to pick them up—two trawlers, which attended the escort as rescue-ships, and a corvette. Within another twenty minutes each of the vessels had reached one or another of the three boats and had taken its men on board. The three vessels then proceeded to steam at full speed after the convoy, and as they did so a destroyer from the escort fleet approached the deserted Executive to finish her off.

Captain Walden, from the deck of the trawler Northern Pride, watched silently as the destroyer began to pour shells from her

4-inch guns into his dying ship. Each thud of the gun seemed to beat upon his heart. And still he could not resist a feeling of admiration for the accuracy of the destroyer's fire. Shell after shell went into the stricken ship, just above her waterline. One shell alone struck higher, setting fire to the superstructure. He saw the flames burst out amidships, just as the ship plunged under, as if she were waving a bright flag in farewell. And then she was gone. It had been only an hour since she had been steaming homeward, untouched.

Captain Walden looked down.

"Well," he said, in a low voice, "that's about all."

As they plunged on after the convoy, the rescue vessels exchanged by radio the names of the men which each had picked up. Captain Walden and his officers sorrowfully checked over the lists. Nine men were gone. Frank Lynch, the young third mate, was gone. It was said that as he slid down the man-rope he had lost his life-belt and had drowned in the icy water. Two of the assistant engineers, Newton and Eisenberg, were gone. Someone had seen Newton blown overboard when the torpedo exploded just beneath the place where he had been standing. The other had been killed at his post in the engine room. Kindya, the chief cook, had been drowned after sliding down a line into the choppy sea.

Fifty-five men had been saved.

Early in the afternoon, the rescue vessels were signalled to bring all the survivors to the cruiser, to be transferred to her. They steamed toward her, the great ship idling her engines to await them. When they were still a mile away from her, new signals suddenly were flashed to them. "Enemy aircraft approaching. Keep clear of us!"

They took their stations, saying little. They looked dumbly at the sky. Fate had no more surprises for them.

The planes came. There were sixteen of them, fighters and bombers both. As they swept over the convoy the curtain of

gunfire from the ships rose joyfully, the voices of the guns were fiercer than the voices of men. The thirty minutes during which the planes circled the ships seemed to stand still, like a suspended breath. The bombs fell here and there among the ships, spouting their white columns harmlessly. And suddenly the planes were gone. A gale had sprung up, whipping up boisterous seas, and, although the planes were gone, it was now impossible to transfer the Executive's survivors to the cruiser. They tried again, on the day following; but still the seas were too rough to permit the little trawlers to come alongside.

"Have you enough fuel oil and water to reach Iceland?" they were asked. And, answering that their supplies were sufficient, they were told to proceed.

The next day brought heavy weather and blanketing snowstorms. The fifth day brought them to Iceland. The trawler's master said goodbye to Captain Walden.

"You and your men were lucky," he said. "You were in your boats for only a few minutes. Not everybody is lucky enough to be picked up so quickly."

"No?" said Captain Walden.

"No," said the other. "I mind we came alongside a life-raft one day. There was one man on it, lying on his back. The waves had been washing over the raft, for a day or more, and had frozen over him, so that his legs and body were sheathed in ice, up to his shoulders. I was sure that he must be dead, and I told my helmsman to swing back on our course. But one of my men said that he thought he had seen the man's head turn a little from side to side.

"So we sent a boat over, and one of my men swung himself down on the raft and bent over the man. The man's eyes were open. Ice was over his mouth, he couldn't speak. Only his eyes pleaded. He wasn't dead. The ice was chopped away from him, and we lifted him on board. But of course he died within a few hours."

"I see," said Captain Walden, drawing a deep breath.

"And there was another time," the trawler captain went on, "when we sighted a lifeboat, full of men. They sat up stiff, holding the oars, and made no move to row towards us, or even to signal us. We came up closer to them, and we saw that all of them were dead. Frozen to the seats they were, and with the oars frozen to their hands. Good reason they didn't row."

"Good reason," agreed Captain Walden, grimly.

Before he left Iceland he saw, one day, a tall man walking up to the door of the hospital building. He walked well, but he carried his arms in a curious fashion. Both the arms were swathed in white, from shoulder to wrist, and he carried them crossed upon his breast.

"That's the captain of a ship that was torpedoed on the way to Russia," Walden was told. "When his boat was picked up, it was found that both arms were frozen. They say they've got to be amputated."

Captain Walden reached New York in April. A friend stopped him on the street.

"Why, hello there, captain!" the man exclaimed. "I haven't seen you for a long time—a whole year, isn't it?"

"That's right," said Captain Walden. "It's been a year."

"Where have you been?" asked the friend. "Or maybe I ought not to ask. I understand they're pretty strict about that."

The captain merely smiled.

"I hope it doesn't take a whole year to go to Russia and back," said his friend, irritably. "We ought to get stuff to Russia quicker than that. Wouldn't you think so?"

"Yes, I would think so," the captain agreed.

"Going to be here long, before you go out again?" the friend persisted.

"No," said Captain Walden, smiling again. "Not long."

* * *

ALL OF THESE SHIPS, about whose voyages a word or two has been set down here, and all the other ships belonging to this one American company, began those voyages at the same pier in Jersey City. To go on board any of these ships, it was necessary to pass through the long shed.

The gayety that had enlivened the departure of a ship in the days of peace had vanished from that pier-shed as completely as if it had never existed. There were no throngs of people, no passengers, no brightly fluttering flags, no gaily shouted farewells—there was only the gaunt and empty length of the great shed, its floors heaped with the drab merchandise of war.

At the landward end of the shed, its two floors were partitioned off into three or four small offices. Men who desired employment upon the voyages to be undertaken by the ships would enter one of these small rooms, on the lower floor. If there was a place for them, they would be told to come again. At the appointed hour, they would walk on through the long shed, climb the ladder to the ship's deck, and, in the presence of the ship's officer, sign their names and be placed upon the crew list.

After that, they did not leave the ship until it had returned from its voyage.

No friend or relative was permitted to come on board at the last moment, to say goodbye. No friend or relative was even permitted to enter the long shed at which the ship lay moored.

If one of these men had a girl who loved him, or a wife, or children, he had already told them goodbye, at some place distant from the pier. They could not come into that building with him. He must enter it alone, and go forward alone, like one who walks unarmed along a darkening road, contemptuous of the Thing that lurks in ambush.

In such moments as these, when a lonely man walked through

the empty pier-shed to go on board his ship, the huge and high-ceilinged building might undergo a curious change, in the mind of the watcher. It had never been designed for beauty, it had been designed for use. But now it might suddenly take on solemn beauty, might become more beautiful than any cathedral, might be filled with the solemn and triumphant music which only he who is ready to give his life for others is worthy to hear.

But these men heard no music and saw no brightness gilding the drab-painted shed. They merely walked forward, without faltering, and took the ship to sea. . . .

These were men whom Fate could never surprise, nor Death dismay.

THE END

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